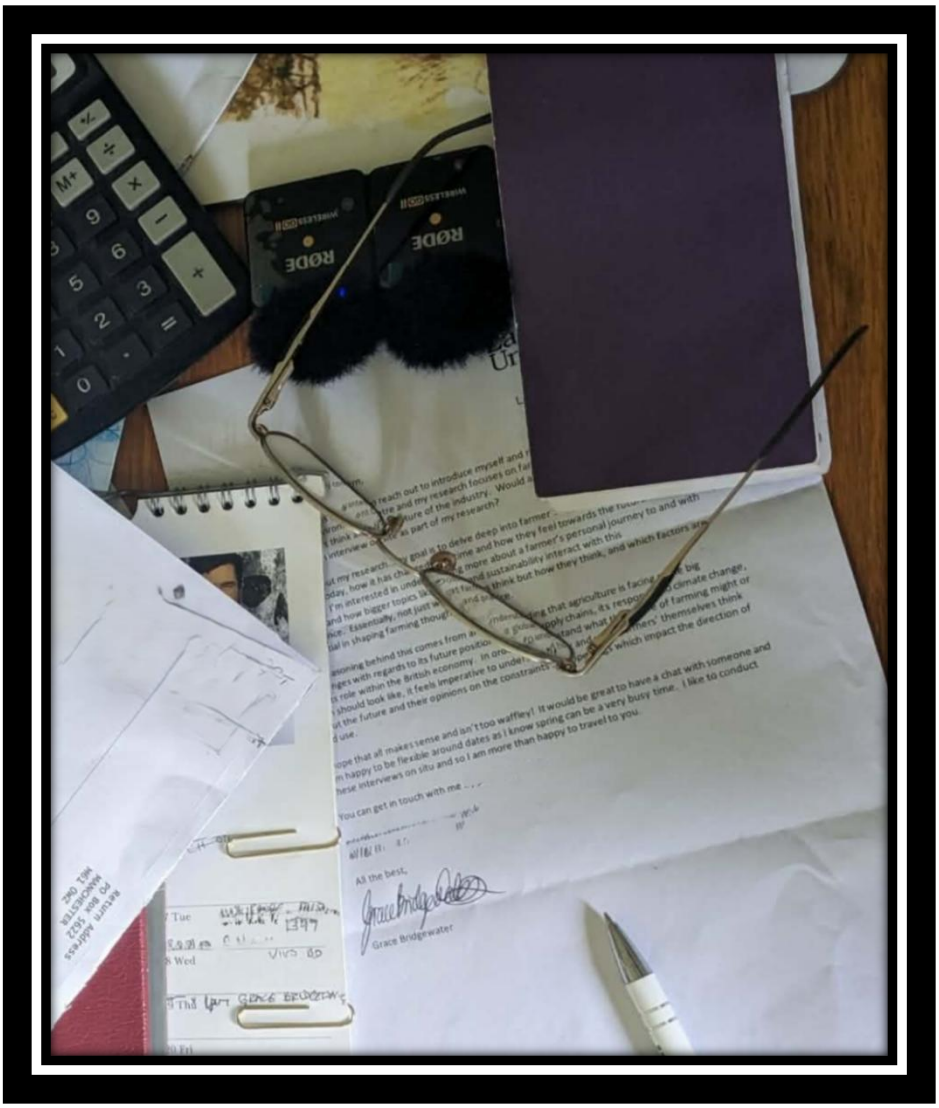
Lancaster Environment Centre | Lancaster University

"The Farm is me. That's how one looks at it":

Exploring political-economic influences on practice, care and identity in contemporary English agriculture



Grace Bridgewater

This thesis is submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy (DPhil) Environmental Science. Submitted March 2026.

"The Farm is me. That's how one looks at it":
Exploring political-economic influences on practice, care and identity in contemporary English agriculture

Abstract:

English farming currently operates in a context characterised by climate instability, post-Brexit policy reform, economic pressures, and uneven power dynamics within supply chains. This thesis examines how English farmers experience and respond to this reality, taking a relational approach that centres lived experience. Whilst experiential knowledge and lived experience perspectives are increasingly valued in some academic literature, they are often overlooked, particularly in relation to more 'abstract' topics such as policy, governance, and economics. Drawing on semi-structured interviews with farmers conducted in 2023, this thesis analyses farmer perspectives on how structural dynamics impact practice and identity. This paper-based thesis employs literature on productivism/post-productivism, the political economy of retailer influence, agricultural care ethics, and the 'good farmer' identity (using Bourdieu's social theory).

Three key findings emerge. First, the significance of economic contexts, particularly the influence of corporate actors – specifically supermarkets – that is underexplored within productivism/post-productivism literature. This influence shapes farm practice through pricing, standards, and contracts, and is experienced as a constraint on farmer autonomy, despite adjudicator legislation. Second, the centrality of care within farming and research practice, and how it is renegotiated within financially-induced farm business expansion and diversification. Aspects of care – attentiveness, embodied practice, responsibility, experiential knowledge – are found to be at risk under these changes. Third, these pressures contribute to a reconfiguration of the 'good farmer' identity. Cultural value is increasingly placed on market-oriented skills, reflecting a growing emphasis on economic independence. This shift contributes to fragmentation within the 'good farmer' identity and shapes market and policy engagement.

By examining the interplay between political-economic dynamics and daily farming life, this thesis offers an empirically grounded account of farmer experiences, while calling for a more care-full approach to academic inquiry.

Contents Page

Acknowledgements

I fantasized about writing this acknowledgements section so many times. Now I am here, I realise that there simply are not words (and I am a woman of many words!). To name all the people, places and things that have got me here would require a whole separate book. However, I cannot pass up the opportunity to be both cheesy and grateful, and if a job is worth doing, it's worth doing badly, so off we go.

The most significant thank you goes to my lead supervisor, Dr Emma Cardwell, who I started working with about halfway through my PhD. Emma not only helped me find and continue to build my 'home' within academia – shout out to the PEAT Research Group – but also provided invaluable feedback and support. Thank you for reading everything so many times, challenging me when necessary, and reminding me to enjoy myself. If emotional labour was properly valued, you would be a very rich person. Thank you as well to Dr David Tyfield for your supervision and kindness, and to Dr James Fraser for being my informal supervisor at times, and for all the general life advice.

Thank you to my family, especially my parents, who supported me in a myriad of ways throughout this process (and before). The most valuable lessons I have learned in life – be kind, be in community, find the humour in things – have come through you.

Thank you to my friends. Despite the fact that my social circle had to shrink considerably during this PhD, I still feel like there are too many of you to name (oh go on, I'll have a quick go – special mentions to Anja, Bee, Charlotte, Ellie, Megan, Sally and V). You have kept me sane, and also not minded too much when I wasn't very sane. I'd also like to mention Maizy, who was doing an invaluable PhD on Rights for Nature before becoming seriously unwell. I would have liked to have done our PhDs at the same time and I am sad that hasn't happened. If we're honest, yours probably would have been better than mine anyway.

Thank you to my partner, Jonny. Having a partner who understands the PhD process has been invaluable. Mostly though, I am grateful for how you have always made clear to me that you don't care if I have a PhD and that it's completely irrelevant to whether you love me. I can't ever really put my gratitude into words, but I might start thinking about using fabric softener on the towels, if that helps.

To Hector, who came with me on fieldwork, fell asleep or cried during writing sessions, and threatened to die at the most inconvenient moments: Thank you for keeping me in the

moment, on the sofa, and going outside every day. You have taught me patience, unconditional love, and how to get poo off most surfaces. You are a very bad research associate and a very good dog.

Author Declaration

I declare that this work was carried out in accordance with Lancaster University's regulations and that no part has been submitted for any other academic award. The sections of this thesis that are the result of co-authorship or have already been published are made clear within the preceding text. The views expressed are those of the author and do not represent those of the University nor the funding body.

This research project was granted ethics approval by the Faculty of Science & Technology Ethics Committee at Lancaster Environment Centre, Lancaster University on 17/5/23. Approval number: FST-2023-3540-RECR-3.

This research was provided three years of funding by the Leverhulme Trust, Centre for 'Material Social Futures', Lancaster University, Grant Reference: DS-2017-036

Grace Bridgewater

March 2026

Prelude

Hello!

This thesis is about people and broader people-y things, like policy, governance, and economic systems. It was written by a person, and intended to be read by other people and, given this, it seems apt that I start by introducing myself.

My name is Grace. I've never really spent much time thinking about my name, but I did a psychotherapy course recently, on Transactional Analysis, and the founder of that modality has a lot to say about names:

"*There is no doubt that in many cases given names, short names, and nicknames, or whatever praenomen is bestowed or inflicted on the innocent newborn, is a clear indication of where his parents want him to go*" (Berne, 1972: 78)

In light of this, I looked up the meaning of my name, and found, among other definitions:

"*to lend honour by one's presence*" (Soanes, 2002: 479)

In many ways, this thesis is an attempt to do that, in an inverse sort of fashion. This is a thesis about agriculture that attempts to allow the voices and perspectives of farmers to grace the pages. I also don't try to 'write out' my own role, an extension of grace towards myself, I suppose. I also want to extend some grace to you, the reader, and not pretend that this thesis will be read by some disembodied mind that does not also have a name, a story, a role to play. It is because of this that large parts of this work are written in this conversational, more creative style. There are further justifications for this writing style, that I will cover in due course.

Of course, as is the issue with any psychotherapy modality, there is the risk of slipping into scrupulosity and reading deeper meanings into things when there isn't really any deeper meaning there. To illustrate this point: I asked my parents why they named me Grace and there isn't a particular deeper meaning. Their alternative – Bridget – would have left me christened "Bridget Bridgewater". I think Eric Berne would have had some things to say about that. Like psychotherapy, periods of navel gazing, and hallucinogenic experiences, when one gets the message, it is time to hang up the phone. On that note – shall we get on with it?

References

Berne, E. (1972) *What do you say after hello? The psychology of human destiny* (Grove Press)

Soanes, C. (ed.) (2002) *The Compact Oxford Dictionary of Current English* (Oxford University Press)

Chapter 1: Introduction

1. Introduction

Change is inevitable, but it is also uneven and often comes in waves. English agriculture is currently on the crest of such a wave of change (Franks, 2022). The deep swell of this change can be traced back into history – as I shall do to a partial extent in Chapter 2 – but I shall outline the crest of this change here. During a pilot interview for this PhD, a farmer told me that "*farming is about two things: politics and the weather*". As a British person, it feels mandatory that I stay true to my roots and begin with our favourite topic: the weather.

The United Kingdom (UK) is seeing warmer, wetter winters and hotter, drier summers which increase the likelihood of heatwaves, flooding and droughts (AHDB, 2025). The average temperature in the UK is rising and there is a significant increase in annual rainfall (AHDB, 2025). There are some opportunities to be gleaned from this change, such as the ability to grow crops previously largely unsuitable for the UK climate (Morison and Matthews, 2016, cited in Wheeler and Lobley, 2021), increased grassland productivity in some geographical pockets (Ritchie et al., 2019), and the potential for a longer growing season (UK Climate Risk, 2021). These are poor consolation in contrast to the negative implications of changes in weather. The Department for Farming, Environment and Rural Affairs has noted that these changes produce "a significant effect on domestic production, particularly arable crops, fruits and vegetables" (DEFRA, 2024a). Both horticultural and arable production were impacted by heavy rainfall over the autumn to spring period of 2023/24 (Newson, 2025). Livestock production is not exempt from these impacts, with dry grasslands and heat stress impacting this sector over the summer heatwave in 2022 as well as an increase in farm fires across the industry (AHDB, 2025). The 2018 summer heatwave contributed to the additional slaughter of 30,000 cows (NFU, 2018) and a wetter summer in 2024 presented issues regarding livestock disease (AHDB, 2025).

Moving from the weather to broader environmental issues, agriculture makes up approximately ten per cent of both UK and global greenhouse gas emissions, making it a vital point of intervention for the fight against climate change (Wentworth and Plumpton, 2019). Biodiversity within the UK is also significantly depleted (Burns et al., 2023). Agricultural lands are key areas for both the mitigation of and adaptation to the impacts of climate change, as well as for how the landscape of Britain is managed more generally. There are changing societal expectations of what agriculture does and/or 'should' provide – as is reflected by the

recent acceleration within British policy towards a 'public goods' framing for agricultural production (Kam et al., 2023). Rural landscapes, recreational areas and the maintenance of cultural landscapes are a part of these 'public goods', reflecting the societal understanding of agriculture's role in wider society (Cusworth and Dodsworth, 2021: 930).

However, within all of this let us not forget a vital component of both agriculture and all of our lives: food. Climate change and the global political climate has seen food security rise up the political agenda (DEFRA, 2024b). 57% of food consumed in the UK was produced domestically (DEFRA, 2026), but there is variation within this – the UK imports the majority of its fruit and vegetables and a smaller amount of its meat (FSA, 2022). Climate change and political unrest pose significant challenges to the UK's food security, and there are shortages with regard to agricultural labour (DEFRA, 2024b). There is also pressure for food prices to be kept low, given rising living costs and a decrease in the number of households that are considered 'food secure' (DEFRA, 2024b). Within agri-food supply chains, farmers occupy a vulnerable position as 'price takers' rather than 'makers' (Barlow and Lostak, 2023) with corporations holding substantial levels of influence within supply chains (The Food Foundation, 2025).

In real terms, agricultural incomes have fallen, profit margins are narrow, and, according to a recent study, a third of British farmers made no profit in the 2024/25 period (McCain, 2025). Farms are becoming fewer and larger (Lobley et al., 2018: 45, 47) with an increasing number of farmers leaving the industry (Joosse and Grubbström, 2017). More short-term, economic factors have been identified within literature as of pressing importance to farmers, which makes responding to the above environmental challenges, which represent longer-term threats, harder (Wheeler and Lobley, 2021). To borrow from Heffron's wording; "farmers cannot go green if they are in the red" (2024). This was said in the context of recent changes to inheritance tax (which I do not delve into in this thesis as it occurred following my interviews with farmers in 2023) but is applicable to broader contexts as well. Recent protests, partly in response to these tax changes, saw such slogans as "we can't afford to feed you anymore" (Matthews, 2025). Despite naïve ideas of the "rural idyll" in the British zeitgeist, it is clear that agricultural communities are undergoing a particularly turbulent time (Hall, 2020).

It's also important to recognise that farming is a unique industry, often interlinked with generational identities (Emery and Carrithers, 2016; Glover, 2010; Wicklow and Shortall,

2020). There are high levels of stress, isolation, and, soberingly, a higher-than-average suicide rate (Garner et al., 2025). This is not intended to over-romanticise and/or paint farmers in a victimised role – this is a diverse and heterogeneous group (Morris and Evans, 1999). Each farmer will have their own experiences, stories, and meanings which make up their work and their relationship to it. The agricultural industry has its own issues regarding land justice and high costs of entry for new entrants who may not be from generational farming backgrounds (Coulson and Milbourne, 2022).

On a policy scale, there has been a significant recent change. When the UK left the European Union in 2020, the 2020 Agricultural Act laid the foundation upon which 'new' agricultural policy could be built. I write 'new' in quotes because, as we shall see in Chapter 2, the actual policies implemented are not entirely novel in their approach, but the speed and scope of this policy overhaul is notable. As I have briefly touched on, this policy shift adopts a 'public money for public goods' model, which sees previous direct payments replaced with agri-environmental schemes. These schemes provide financial compensation for farmers who undertake land management practices which are more environmentally friendly (Batáry et al., 2015). Land management practices that are compensated may be, for example, the planting and appropriate management of hedgerows (Norton et al., 2024) or leaving a 'buffer strip' between where 'productive' farming activity begins and a feature (hedgerow, stream etc.) beneficial for the environment (RPA and NE, 2024). These activities are more likely to be neglected without such compensation, as the farmer must focus solely on utilising their land for food production to ensure income. Direct payments, which are being phased out, make up a substantial proportion of farm business incomes, with cereals, livestock grazing and mixed farm producers particularly impacted (DEFRA, 2025). These policy changes are therefore a significant sea-change for farm accounts. Further details of this policy change are outlined in Chapter 2.

Whilst pockets of academic scholarship have recognised the value of experiential knowledge that farmers hold (Wheeler and Lobley, 2021; Krzywoszynska, 2016; Riley, 2008; Singleton, 2012 – to cite a few), it is also established that policy, governance and academic spheres overlook these knowledges too frequently (Brown et al., 2021; Curry, 2002; Little et al., 2022). This thesis therefore aims to better understand the experience of the farmers who are currently swimming in this sea-change that I have just outlined. It draws on fieldwork interviews conducted in 2023 and the findings are presented as papers which form the main

chapters. As I made clear in the preamble, this thesis attempts to present the research process in a transparent, honest, human way.

2. Thesis Overview and Chapter Summaries

Following this introduction, I give a literature review. This is presented through the metaphor of a walk, which allows me to be authentic with you about what I read before my fieldwork, and what my fieldwork prompted me to change, and the literature that this change led me to. The PhD journey is often presented as a linear march, where the author has never gotten lost and never lost sight of their motives, the 'who' and 'what' they are doing this for (Hampton, 1995). I begin this literature review by covering aspects of agricultural policy relevant to this thesis, before outlining some moments of mild existentialism and the literature that this led me to – relational approaches to research. After our brief, philosophical interlude we carry on down the footpaths of supermarket influence, 'good farmer' scholarship and agricultural care ethics.

I then present the research design and methodology in Chapter 3, which outlines the themes uncovered from interview analysis. These themes inform the papers presented in the remainder of this thesis, which are as follows:

2.1 Chapter 4: Making sense of meaning, making meaning of sense: Re-centring care in research

This chapter contains a paper of mine which was published in *Emotion, Space and Society* in 2025. This work presents how embodied, lived experience shapes research practice through a phenomenological account of my PhD journey. Through this, this article has contributed to literature on the politics of knowledge, providing a more human illustration of how emotion impacts the production of knowledge. It presents an original argument on the implications of emotional repression within academic scholarship, that is, the dangers that such repression leads to more extractivist styles of research. This article has also contributed to the growing recognition of lived experience practitioners within the mental health sphere, presenting an argument for the value of lived experience within broader contexts, including this thesis' decision to centre the perspective of farmers. Scholarship on care ethics is connected to the therapeutic modality of Democratic Therapeutic Communities for the first time within literature.

2.2 Chapter 5: "*Evil accountants*" and "*the biggest bastards in the country*": Productivism, post-productivism and farmer perceptions of supermarket power in the UK

This chapter presents a co-authored paper with Dr Emma Cardwell. This piece is currently under peer review with *Journal of Rural Studies*. This article responds to the frequency that supermarkets were mentioned by farmers as influential on their practice, identifying a previously unrecognised literature gap within the productivist to post-productivist transition literature. Integrating literature on productivism and post-productivism within this article allows my co-author and I to identify the ways in which farmers must respond to 'hybrid' demands which contain both productivist and post-productivist components. Drawing on interview data, this paper presents an analysis of how supermarkets influence English agriculture through market control, standard setting and policy lobbying. This article links the importance of engaging with grounded farmer perspectives – a running theme in this thesis – to the insights of literature which critiques the post productivist 'moment' in rural and agrarian studies. Farmer perspectives on policy are also addressed here, as a surprising contrast was found between how farmers framed policy's influence in comparison to supermarket's. This contrast was identified only through continued engagement with 'on-the-ground' perspectives, resulting in this paper's concluding call for greater consideration to be given to these perspectives within policy-orientated literature.

2.3 Chapter 6: Good Care in Hard Times: The Re-Negotiation of Care amid Farm Business Expansion and Diversification in England

With the value of experiential knowledge firmly addressed in Chapter 4, this paper turns to the role of experiential knowledge within farming and presents an overview of the affective connections interviewees had with their farms. Here, literature on agricultural care ethics is drawn on and I examine how care is re-negotiated within the contexts of farm business expansion and diversification. The dimensions between farm business (re)structuring and care ethics have been previously underexplored within agri-care literature. Through this focus, this paper is also able to attend to the topic of 'distance' within care practice, something that previous literature has identified as an important task for scholarship (Cusworth, 2023; Popke, 2006; Bartos, 2019; Tronto, 1993; Smith, 1998). I present the tensions between the daily reality of English farm life and the broader 'top-down' demands placed on farmers which can be framed as requests for farmers to 'care more'. This work outlines how aspects of care – responsibility, experiential knowledge, embodied practice – are

at risk when farm businesses restructure in response to economic pressures. In doing this, I am able to communicate the tensions between policy and governance demands, economic context, and the detailed reality of 'good care' on farms. This makes this paper relevant not just to scholars within the field of care ethics, but also to those with an interest in how top-down governance seeks to 'steer' farming in a more 'caring' direction.

2.4 Chapter 7: "*You can only embrace it because you're not going to stop it. Why not embrace what's coming?*": Reconfiguration of 'Good Farmer' Identity and the Skill of Market Responsiveness in English Agriculture

Having examined both the economic and affective dimensions of English farm life, this chapter examines how these conditions impact farmers identities. The 'good farmer' identity literature has produced insightful analysis on the interplay between 'top-down' prescriptions for agriculture and on-the-ground farming culture (Burton et al., 2008; Burton and Paragahawewa, 2011; Cusworth and Dodsworth, 2021; Riley, 2016). By drawing on the 'good farmer' identity concept and Bourdieu's social theory, this paper's analysis encompasses both macro-level change and relational, cultural dynamics within its scope. Having foregrounded the affective attachment farmers have to their work in Chapter 6, this paper examines how this attachment informs the need to remain active within this agricultural industry, and the costs this can come with. Interview transcripts showed that farmers are seeing business acumen as increasingly relevant to farm success. This paper examines how this is metabolised within farmer identities, with specific skills (namely, the ability to respond quickly to market dynamics) becoming valued on a cultural level – something previously unexplored within 'good farmer' scholarship.

Variations and nuances within both collective and individual identities are discussed within this paper, contributing to scholarship on the increased fragmentation of the 'good farmer' identity. Farmer perspectives on policy change reveals fascinating and original insights, with some viewing this change as a way for 'bad' farmers (who cannot maintain a commercially viable enterprise) to be removed from the social (and literal, given the topic) field. Through this analysis, and relevant to that presented in Chapter 5, this paper also invites wider discussion on if 'productivism' remains an accurate descriptor within 'good farmer' literature.

3. Conclusion

Whilst this thesis has opted for a multi-paper format, I address how these papers come together throughout and conclude with a focused consideration on the overarching themes.

Within Chapter 8, I cover the centrality and importance of care within this thesis, the significance of economic pressures on farmers' lived experience, and the theme of challenges to autonomy seen throughout this thesis. I cover some of the limitations in this research and draw out implications for further research. This is done through the metaphor of cider making, as anyone who reads a whole thesis could do with a drink at the end!

References

AHDB (Agriculture and Horticulture Development Board) (2025) *Climate Change Adaptation*, https://projectblue.blob.core.windows.net/media/Default/Environment/Climate_Change_Report%20(ARP4)%20250218_WEB.pdf Accessed 17/3/26

Barlow, H., Lostak, M. (2023) Retailer and grower relationships and the supply chain pressures in English horticulture: The lived experience, *Journal of Rural Studies* (102:11)

Bartos, A. (2019) Introduction: Stretching the Boundaries of Care, *Gender, Place and Culture* (26:6)

Batáry, P., Dicks, L V., Kleijn, D., Sutherland, W J. (2015) The role of agri-environmental schemes in conservation and environmental management, *Conservation Biology* (29:4)

Brown, C., Kovács, E., Herzon, I., Villamayor-Tomas, S., Albizua, A., Galanaki, A., Grammatikopoulou, I., McCracken, D., Alkan Olsson, J., Zinnegrebe, Y. (2011) Simplistic understandings of farmer motivations could undermine the environmental potential of the common agricultural policy, *Land Use Policy* (101)

Burns, F., Mordue, S., Al-Fulaij, N., Boersch-Supan, P., Boswell, J., Boyd, R J., Bradfer-Lawrence, T., de Ornellas, P., de Palma, A., de Zylva, P., Dennis, E B., Fostor, S., Gilbert, G., Halliwell, L., Hawkins, K., Haysom, K A., Holland, M., Hughes, J., Jackson, A C., Mancini, F., Mathews, F., McQuatters-Gollop, A., Noble, D., O'Brien, D., Pescott, O L., Purvis, A., Simkin, J., Smith, A., Stanbury, A., Villemot, J., Walton, P., Webb, T J., Williams, J., Rilwon, R., Gregory, R D. (2023) *State of Nature Report*, https://stateofnature.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/TP25999-State-of-Nature-main-report_2023_FULL-DOC-v12.pdf Accessed 22/2/26

Burton, R J F., Kuczera, C., Schwarz, G. (2008) Exploring farmers' cultural resistance to voluntary agri-environmental schemes, *Sociologia Ruralis* (48)

Burton, R J F., Paragahawewa, U H. (2011) Creating culturally sustainable agri-environmental schemes, *Journal of Rural Studies* (27)

Coulson, H., Milbourne, P. (2022) Agriculture, food and land: Struggles for UK post-Brexit agri-food justice, *Geoforum* (131)

Curry, J M. (2002) Care Theory and 'caring' systems of Agriculture, *Agriculture and Human Values* (19)

Cusworth G., Dodsworth, J. (2021) Using the 'good farmer' concept to explore agricultural attitudes to the provision of public goods. A case study of participants in an English agri-environmental scheme, *Agriculture and Human Values* (38)

Cusworth, G. (2023) Metabolic agricultural ethics: Violence and care beyond the gate, *Progress in Environmental Geography* (2:1-2)

DEFRA (Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs) (2024a) United Kingdom Food Security Report 2024: Theme 2: UK Food Supply Sources, https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/united-kingdom-food-security-report-2024/united-kingdom-food-security-report-2024-theme-2-uk-food-supply-sources Accessed 17/3/16

DEFRA (2024b) *UK Food Security Report 2024*, https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/6756e300a63e1781efb877a1/United_Kingdom_Food_Security_Report_2024_11dec2024_printable.pdf Accessed 17/3/26

DEFRA (2025) Farm Business Income by type of farm in England 2023/24, https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/farm-business-income/farm-business-income-by-type-of-farm-in-england-202324#farm-business-income-by-cost-centre Accessed 24/07/25

DEFRA (2026) Food statistics in your pocket, https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/food-statistics-pocketbook/food-statistics-in-your-pocket Accessed 17/3/26

Emery, S B., Carrithers, M B. (2016) From lived experience to political representation: Rhetoric and landscape in the North York Moors, *Ethnography* (17:3)

Food Foundation, The (2025) *Corporate lobbying: the dark side of the plate*, https://foodfoundation.org.uk/publication/corporate-lobbying-dark-side-plate Accessed 8/12/25

Franks, J R. (2022) UK Agriculture at a crossroads, *Outlook on Agriculture* (51:4)

FSA (Food Standards Agency) (2022) *Our Food 2021: An annual review of food standards across the UK*, https://www.food.gov.uk/our-work/annualreviewoffoodstandards2021 Accessed 8/12/25

Garner, I., McFeeters, D., Guy, A., Hopley, R., Galbraith, N. (2025) Understanding farmer mental health and wellbeing in a volatile, isolating and misunderstood industry, *Journal of Rural Studies* (118)

Glover, J L. (2010) Capital Usage in Adverse Situations: Applying Bourdieu's Theory of Capital to Family Farm Businesses, *Journal of Family and Economic Issues* (31)

Hall, T. (2020) After the rural idyll: representations of the British countryside as a non-idyllic environment, *Geography* (105)

Hampton, E. (1995) Memory comes before knowledge: Research may improve if researchers remember their motives, *Canadian Journal of Native Education* (21)

Heffron, A. (2024) Farm inheritance tax: farmers cannot go green if they are in the red, *The Conversation*, https://theconversation.com/farm-inheritance-tax-farmers-cannot-go-green-if-they-are-in-the-red-243527 Accessed 17/3/26

Joosse, S., Grubbström, A. (2017) Continuity in farming – Not just a family business, *Journal of Rural Studies* (50)

Kam, H., Smith, H., Potter, C. (2023) Public money for public goods: the role of ideas in driving agriculture policy in the EU and post-Brexit UK, *Land Use Policy* (129)

Krzywoszynska, A. (2016) What farmers know: Experiential knowledge and care in vine growing, *Sociologia Ruralis* (56:2)

Little, R., Lyon, J., Tsouvalis, J. (2022) The co-design of post-Brexit and agri-environmental policy – focusing on environmental land management in England, in, Attorp, A., Heron, S., McAreavey, R. (eds.) *Rural Governance in the UK: Towards a Sustainable and Equitable Society* (Routledge)

Lobley, M., Winter, M., Wheeler, R. (2018) *The Changing World of Farming in Brexit UK* (Taylor and Francis)

Matthews, A. (2025) Farmers protest as Finance Bill gets second reading, *Farmers Weekly*, https://www.fwi.co.uk/news/farm-policy/farmers-protest-as-finance-bill-gets-second-reading Accessed 17/3/26

McCain (2025) *Farmdex Report 2025*, https://www.mccain.co.uk/media/s0wjuwhn/mccain_farmdexreport.pdf Accessed 10/12/25

Morris, C., Evans, N. (1999) Research on the geography of agricultural change: redundant or revitalised? *Area* (13:4)

Newson, N. (2025) Climate change: supporting farmers and growers, *House of Lords Library*, https://lordslibrary.parliament.uk/climate-change-supporting-farmers-and-growers/ Accessed 17/3/26

NFU (National Farmers' Union) (2018) Learning lessons from the 2018 agricultural drought, https://www.nfuonline.com/media/mcbh24td/learning-lessons-from-the-2018-agricultural-drought.pdf Accessed 17/3/26

Norton, L., McCracken, M., Maskell, L., Staley, J., Wood, C., Henrys, P., Patton, J., Broughton, R K. (2024) An evaluation of Agri-Environment Scheme impact on hedgerows in England – Final report for Natural England, UK Centre for Ecology and Hydrology, https://www.ceh.ac.uk/sites/default/files/2024-11/Agri-env%20hedges%20Final%20Report.pdf Accessed 19/3/26

Popke, J. (2006) Geography and Ethics: Everyday Mediations Through Care and Consumption, *Progress in Human Geography* (19:1)

Riley, M. (2008) Experts in their field: farmer-expert-knowledges and environmentally friendly farming practices, *Environment and Planning A* (40)

Riley, M. (2016) How does longer term participation in agri-environment schemes [re]shape farmers' environmental dispositions and identities? *Land Use Policy* (52)

Ritchie, P D L., Harper, A B., Smith, G S., Kahana, R., Kendon, E J., Lewis, H., Fezzi, C., Halleck-Vega, S., Boulton, C A., Bateman, I J., Lenton, T M. (2019) Large changes in

Great Britain's vegetation and agricultural land-use predicted under unmitigated climate change, *Environmental Research Letters* (14:11)

RPA (Rural Payments Agency), NE (Natural England) (2024) SW1: 4m to 6m buffer strip on cultivated land, https://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/ukgwa/20250603150832/https://www.gov.uk/countryside-stewardship-grants/4m-to-6m-buffer-strip-on-cultivated-land-sw1 Accessed 19/3/26

Singleton, V. (2012) When Contexts Meet: Feminism and Accountability in UK Cattle Farming, *Science, Technology and Human Values* (37:4)

Smith, D. (1998) How far should we care? On the spatial scope of beneficence, *Progress in Human Geography* (22)

Tronto, J C. (1993) *Moral Boundaries: A Political Argument for an Ethic of Care* (Routledge)

UK Climate Risk (2021) *Agriculture and Food Sector Briefing: Findings from the third UK Climate Change Risk Assessment (CCRA3) Evidence Report 2021*, https://www.ukclimaterisk.org/publications/agriculture-and-food-sector-briefing/#section-32-background Accessed 17/3/26

Wentworth, J., Plumpton, H. (2019) Climate Change and Agriculture (POSTnote No.600) *The Parliamentary Office of Science and Technology*, https://doi.org/10.58248/PN600 Accessed 17/2/25

Wheeler, R., Lobley, M. (2021) Managing extreme weather and climate change in UK agriculture: Impacts, attitudes and action among farmers and stakeholders, *Climate Risk Management* (32)

Wicklow, D., Shortall, S. (2024) Power positions in the farm family, marrying in, and negative peer pressure: the social relations that impact agricultural practice, *Agriculture and Human Values* (42)

Chapter 2: Literature Review

1. Introduction

I once got some very good advice about literature reviews, which is that they are akin to taking someone on a walk. The writer is retracing their steps through a literature landscape, narrating the route and the purpose behind it to the reader. These walks often start out in the wide open landscape of a whole discipline, ending in niche woods where the reader is introduced to specific trees the author has got to know well. Following this advice, I would like to approach this literature as a walk that we will go on together.

We're going to start at a brisk pace, through agricultural policy changes following the Second World War (Section 2) and up until the early 21st century (Section 3). We can then have a break and look at one of those informational boards often displayed in popular visitors sites. This will tell us about how literature made sense of these post-war policy changes, via the 'productivism-to-post-productivism' field of scholarship (Section 4.1). We will look at the critiques of this approach, layered over the top like graffiti. Moving forward through time again, I'll outline post-Brexit agricultural policy changes and some of the shortcomings of this policy that have been expressed in literature (Sections 5 and 5.1). We'll begin our trek up Reflexivity Hill, where I'll explain some of the experiences I had while conducting fieldwork and how this led to a change in my epistemological and methodological approach, outlining some perspectives on relationality within scholarship (Section 6).

Reflexivity Hill is good for sitting and thinking, something I have spent considerable time doing over the doctoral experience. In this instance, I'll discuss with you how the relationality literature influenced my research and why. In light of this discussion, we will then keep walking, through literature on some key actors within agri-food supply chains – food retailers – (Section 7) and then down two particular 'footpaths' I discovered via this iterative, grounded theoretical approach to theorisation. The first is the 'good farmer' identity literature (Section 8.1) and the second is agricultural care ethics (Section 8.2). Some of the potential limitations of these approaches will also be discussed. As with any good walk, there is a pub at the end in lieu of a conclusion.

2. Post-War Agricultural Policy Change

We start this hike in the past. Whilst the focus of this thesis is on contemporary agrarian change, it is difficult to discuss the current agricultural landscape without mentioning the

impact of the Second World War on UK agriculture. Prior to the Second World War, a great deal of British food was imported, reflecting historical (and ongoing) colonial legacies, of which agriculture is a central theme (Brassley and Soffe, 2016: 104; Weis, 2019; Friedmann, 2005). The war drastically influenced agriculture – mechanisation and synthetic fertiliser use increased and agriculture generally shifted towards an intensive style which sought high yields with larger farms seeing greater success (Long, 1963; Mayozer and Roudart, 2006: 383, 375; Muirhead and Almås, 2012: 27). Besides the more literal changes, the war also changed the way UK agriculture was governed (Murdoch and Ward, 1997). Government began to take a much more active and directive role and food security remained high on the political agenda post-war, resulting in legislation aimed at protecting the domestic agricultural market. A prime example of this is the 1947 Agriculture Act, which guaranteed prices and markets to farmers. In comparison to other sectors, agriculture received relatively "special treatment" within global trade discussions and legislation retained its protectionist flavour (Hathaway, 1997). This remained the case when the UK joined the European Union (previously European Economic Community) in 1973, with its agricultural policy thus stemming from the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) of the EU. Milward described the CAP as a form of "extended public welfare" during the mid-20th century (1984: 229), and there was significant power wielded over the process by the farming lobby, resulting in an "extremely generous system of production orientated subsidies" (Burton, 2004a: 195). The need to conciliate both farmers and consumers was also part of Western fear of growing Communist influence on the global scale (Friedmann and McMichael, 1989).

Of course, we're walking rather fast, getting a very broad overview – doing this makes it easy to paint historical trajectories with broad and uniform brush strokes. Other people have walked this way much slower than we are. If we were to stop and slow down, we would find nuances and diversity in the individual accounts of this period of history, as others have done (Harvey and Riley, 2005). The overall narrative of protectionist policy, increased government intervention, and a more 'productivist' style of agriculture remains wholly accurate, but the impact of these top-down narratives on-the-ground is more uneven than our brisk jaunt would suggest. However, we have ground to cover if we are to make it into the present before the end of the day, so let us continue with a more macro perspective.

3. Mid 20th Century to Early 21st Century Agricultural Policy Change

This protectionist policy style, which guaranteed market prices for agricultural products and the broader encouragement of productivist farming was, it will not surprise you, productive. However, this success resulted in something akin to The Magic Porridge Pot[1], with European agricultural productivity eventually causing levels of production so high that they "threatened to drown Europeans in oceans of surplus milk and wine or butter and wheat" (Muirhead and Almås, 2012). I like to imagine that instead of wading through mud, we are marching our way through a sea of various dairy products, but I think this image is perhaps a little exaggerated. This oversupply resulted in price distortions and economic inefficiencies (funny how that's never mentioned in The Magic Porridge Pot), and the CAP was criticised for driving agricultural intensification resulting in environmental externalities (Shoard, 1980; Bowers and Cheshire, 1983; Buckwell et al., 1982; Campbell, 2009). Alongside concerns about the environmental impact, apprehension was also raised regarding livestock welfare, broader human health, and exacerbating income inequalities between large and smaller farms (Almås and Campbell, 2012; Harvey and Thomson, 1985). Burton locates these issues within the following chronology: the 1970s saw environmental concerns, the 1980s heralded issues of oversupply, and disease outbreaks in the 1990s/2000s (bovine spongiform encephalopathy, foot and mouth disease, e. coli) resulted in health-related concerns (2004a: 195).

The costs of the CAP as a percentage share of the whole European budget also became an increasingly common discussion point and a turn towards more market-liberal ideologies on a global scale saw calls for agriculture to be 'opened up' to free trade in the same manner as other goods and services (Feindt, 2018). Agricultural liberalisation became an important, if reluctantly given, contribution on behalf of richer countries within trade deals (Elliot, 2007).

The various 'Action Programmes for the Environment' produced by the European Commission in 1972, 1977 and 1983 increasingly recognised the issue of agricultural pollution (Baldock and Lowe, 1996). In 1985, the European Commission's 'Green Book' stressed the role of stewardship within agriculture, and that this stewardship should be compensated, also noting the need for diversification within agricultural income (Scheele, 1996: 3-4). A significant change, however, came as part of the General Agreement on Tariffs

[1] The Magic Porridge Pot is a children's folk tale originally part of Grimm's Fairy Tales. It is about a child who is given a magic pot which produces porridge (and then stops producing porridge) in response to verbal commands. The child's mother uses the pot but forgets the magic words for 'stop' and porridge overflows, flooding the entire town. It was eventually stopped and everyone had to eat their way back to their homes.

and Trade (GATT) discussions in the Uruguay Round, conducted from 1986 to 1993 (talk about a long meeting). After years of reluctance from European nations regarding the 'opening up' of agricultural trade to the global market, the Uruguay Round represented a significant, if reluctant, departure from this approach. The outcome of this was that policies seen as 'distorting' trade were reduced, such as tariff protections and subsidies not linked to specific environmental or cultural benefits (OECD, 2001). Muirhead and Almås note that this change marked the acceptance that previous 'productivist' agriculture no longer "reflect[ed] current production or fiscal realities" and that this moment marks the first 'official' interest in a more multifunctional approach (2012: 48). In 1992, the MacSharry Reforms to CAP implemented these changes. These reforms were not unheard-of aspects of agricultural policy, but they now took up a central part of the CAP, introducing agri-environmental programmes, early retirement schemes for farmers, and measures to support (re)forestation (Baldock and Lowe, 1996). Agenda 2000, implemented from 2000-2006, saw further reforms with price support for agricultural production reduced (direct payments were increased to compensate). The CAP was divided into two 'pillars': support for production and support for rural development (agri-environmental schemes, diversification etc.). Further change occurred in 2003, when the Fischler Reform uncoupled subsidies from specific crops, morphing then into a single farm payments scheme. In 2013, the CAP saw a decrease in total spending and changes were made to harmonise payments between and within member states, introducing maximum payment amounts for recipients, and increasing the 'green' payments given under Pillar 1 (Greer, 2017). Funny, I did not notice whilst we were walking, but look – our feet are dry again!

Once more, this is a whistle stop tour which skips over some of the details. None of these reforms were without controversy and further GATT rounds, such as those in 2001 in Doha, were less successful at progressing the trend towards a more liberalised agricultural sector. This reluctance marks the long-standing legacy of agricultural protectionism as a legislative approach within Europe which, although 'diluted', has never been fully rejected (Muirhead and Almås, 2012).

4. How did literature 'make sense' of these changes?

4.1 Productivism to post-productivism?

How convenient, an information board! You know, those notice boards that show a map or short snippets of information about the area you are in? As I took us on such a quick walk –

I'll give us time to catch our breath – it would be helpful to pause and read over this board, to see how the academic literature 'made sense' of these changes.

The style and culture of agricultural practice in the post-war years were labelled 'productivism' within the literature (Walford, 2003; Wilson and Rigg, 2003), although this was a retrospective term developed only after the shift away from this style began. The most cited definition of productivism comes from Lowe et al., who describe it as ''a commitment to an intensive, industrially driven and expansionist agriculture with state support based primarily on output and increased productivity" (1993: 221). Examining the changes I have taken us through in Section 3, rural studies literature conceptualised this agricultural transition as a shift from productivism to post-productivism (Potter and Tilzey, 2005). References to 'post-productivism' in the literature begin in the early 1990s (Shucksmith, 1993; Ward, 1993), reaching popularity in the late 1990s (Halfacree, 1997; 1999; Marsden, 1998; Wilson and Wilson, 1997), before facing considerable critique in the early 2000s (Evans et al., 2002; Wilson, 2001; Walford, 2003; Potter and Tilzey, 2005). I like to imagine this as carefully crafted graffiti on top of the original display board, where scholars have outlined the issues with the original information presented. This metaphor is not intended to communicate any negative judgement on either this area of scholarship or graffiti!

A concise classification for post-productivism which repeats throughout its use in the literature is lacking, especially during the term's most prolific years. Some sources define it largely in its opposition to productivism (Marsden et al., 1993), with Ilbery and Bowler writing that post-productivism encapsulates three "dimensions of change" (1998); intensification to extensification (meaning a reduction in farm inputs, largely for environmental reasons), concentration to dispersal, specialization to diversification. A broader inclusion of policy actors (Marsden et al., 1993; Lowe et al., 1986; Hart and Wilson, 1998), reduction and broader changes in state support for agriculture (Lowe et al., 1993; Marsden, 1998), growing concern for environmental protection (Boisson and Buller, 1996), and/or attempts to integrate a diversity of objectives into rural and agrarian land use (Ward, 1993; Lowe et al., 1993) are all present in the literature as (arguably weak) attempts to define part or all of the post-productivist regime change. In a critical approach to the term, Evans et al. isolate the label to five broad categories:

"the shift from quantity to quality in food production; the growth of on-farm diversification and off-farm employment (pluriactivity); extensification and the promotion of sustainable

farming through agri-environmental policy; dispersion of production patterns; environmental regulation and restricting of government support for agriculture" (2002: 317)

The elusive and fuzziness of post-productivism's definition was critiqued in the early 2000s, with scholars feeling that the term was an attempt to fit a spectrum of farming practices, views, and policy changes into an overly dualistic format (Evans et al., 2002; Wilson, 2001; Walford, 2003). Wilson (2001) argues that this body of literature is overly shaped by political economy and structuralist perspectives, neglecting the heterogeneous reality of farming. Similarly to Wilson, Marsden et al. framed the lack of inclusion of more 'bottom up' research perspectives in the post-productivist literature as an example of "excessive economism" which resulted in overly top-down assumptions about how change occurs (1993: 20). Potter and Tilzey affirm some of these critiques, although they caution against the creation of "a false dichotomy between the putatively 'real' world of local actors and the abstract and theoretical one of global food regimes" (2005: 583).

A major, glaring issue with the productivism to post-productivism approach was a lack of empirical evidence. Not only did this shift not appear to be happening across the spatial range it aimed to encompass, for example in Eastern Europe (Whitby, 1996) and Greece (Louloudis et al., 2000), it also had little empirical support from within Western Europe and Britain. Wilson outlines how a neglect of "actor orientated and behaviourally grounded" research is partly to blame for the widespread, uncritical acceptance of the overly top-down model of the supposed shift to post-productivism (2001). His critique, drawing on wider empirical data (Morris and Potter, 1995; Wilson, 1996, 1997; Lobley and Potter, 1998; Ward et al., 1998), shows how the grassroots actors involved present "a plurality of often highly disparate opinions… [from] diverse actor communities that can neither be branded 'productivist' or 'post-productivist'" (2001: 87). He argued that only when farmers' attitudes can be found to have shifted can any semblance of 'post' productivism be evidenced (2001: 87). Such evidence was not available to support this, with farmers presenting actively productivist attitudes and being particularly critical of 'green' agricultural policies (Potter, 1998; Morris and Potter, 1995; Lobley and Potter, 1998). With the rising critique of post-productivism, studies were conducted specifically with this framework in mind. Evans et al., who compiled the five defining characteristics of post-productivism outlined above, found the evidence of these five elements of post-productivism occurring was lacking (2002). Their paper concludes that "future progress in agricultural research will only be made if post-productivism is abandoned" (2002: 313). Walford looked specifically at South East England

to search for evidence pertaining to post-productivism and found that "far from the demise of productivism, it is alive and well" (2003: 500).

Whilst there was a lack of bottom-up evidence from individual actors, the post-productivist moment in rural studies is easier to understand when viewed from a top-down regulatory perspective. Our speed walk through policy changes in Section 3 provides clear evidence for a shift towards post-productivism, although Wilson argues that this policy was over relied upon for evidence of 'actual' change (2001: 83). Boisson and Buller cite the 1992 MacSharry Reforms as evidence of post-productivism (1996), with Agenda 2000 also framed as post-productivist by some (Buller et al., 2000).

Looking at this original productivism to post-productivism literature, we can see issues with an overly top-down perspective to understanding regime change. The first, as we have already discussed, is that policy change does not necessarily equal on-the-ground changes in practice, behaviour and/or attitudes – an "implementation gap" (Wilson, 2001: 88). The second is that many of these changes were perhaps not as post-productivist through and through as certain literature would suggest and/or were later watered down in their application (Whitby, 1996; Potter, 1998; Wilson, 2001; Hart and Wilson, 1998). Literature which is critical of the post-productivism trend makes sense of this by suggesting that there is undoubtedly a change underway, but this change is uneven, with variations in how extensively it has been adopted in on-the-ground farming practice.

4.2 Beyond post-productivism

Let us keep walking now, and follow the direction which literature took in response to the critiqued 'productivism to post-productivism' moment. In his seminal text on the post-productivism debate, Geoff Wilson proposed "multifunctional agricultural regime" (2001) as post-productivism's more operational replacement. Within British Geography, this term has become commonly referred to as "multifunctionality" (Wilson, 2008). Multifunctionality is a discourse within which "agriculture is viewed as a provider of public goods in addition to, and in many ways more important than its role as a producer of raw material for the food industry" (Moyer and Josling, 2002: 35). The place-based nature of agricultural transformation is better reflected in the literature now, with scholarship paying increased attention to how agrarian regimes will be enacted differently across geographical areas, even those within the same country. This can be seen in work of Holmes, who examined the presence of both productivist and 'post-productivist' practice across a range of locations

within Australia (Holmes, 2008, 2010a, 2010b, 2012). Holmes later rejected the term 'post-productivist' and instead began to use 'multifunctional' as a more accurate descriptor (see Roche and Argent, 2015). Scholarship has also become increasingly mindful of the potential divergence between 'top-down' discourses and the actions of locally-situated autonomous actors (Wilson, 2004).

This is not to say that post-productivism as a framing is entirely unhelpful. Original post-productivist literature generated useful insights into the changes underway, and the critiques layered atop of it further this analysis. The debate around the term reflects the competing and fragmenting demands which the agricultural industry was, and is, facing. Beacham et al. (2023) have identified how contemporary UK farms must attempt to balance a hybrid position of both productivist and post-productivist pressures, often in tension. In this manner, the 'slipperiness' of the term 'post-productivism' can be helpful for understanding the current agricultural landscape as one that exists across a spectrum, responding to a multitude of demands and approaches. The post-productivist 'moment' (although the term is still used today) offers important lessons for agrarian research, particularly regarding the divergence that can occur between policy change and ground-level shifts and the importance of consideration as to what and who can be 'missed' within academic discourse, as discussed in Chapter 5.

Besides post-productivism, literature presents three main discourses as competing for influence over agricultural policy. Multifunctionality is one of these, with neomercantilism and neoliberalism making up the rest of this triad (Frank et al., 2024). Neomercantilism is strongly linked to original productivist views and asserts that the state should protect and financially support agriculture so that they may fulfil their duty of "feeding the world" (Gravey, 2022). Neoliberalism describes the belief that "human well being can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterized by strong private property rights, free markets and free trade" (Harvey, 2007: 11). In relation to agriculture, the neoliberal perspective on agricultural policy advocates for the industry to be treated just like any other economic sector; disciplined by market competitiveness to ensure higher efficiency, often foregrounding technological innovation, digitalisation, and specialisation as specific tools to achieve this (Frank et al., 2024; Potter and Tilzey, 2005). These discourses occur in a blended fashion when their influence on policy is analysed (Frank et al., 2024). Productivism remains an influential ideology, and some have argued that it is making a resurgence, as "climate change,

population growth and the vigilance of farmers have put the cat among the liberalisation-minded pigeons" (Muirhead and Almås, 2012).

5. Post-Brexit Agricultural Policy in England

Ah – Brexit land! A turbulent landscape, home to many infamous 'Christmas Dinner' wars, where feuds have split families and left roast potatoes cold and abandoned. As I am sure you are well aware, a UK referendum in 2016 resulted in its departure from the EU, which occurred formally in 2020. Having previously been legislated under the CAP, this departure gave the UK the opportunity to make major changes to its agricultural policy (Helm, 2017). Up until now, our journey has taken us through policy changes relevant to Europe and Britain as a whole, but now we start to take a more specific path. Given this thesis' focus on England, and the devolved administrations' authority to pursue distinct agricultural policies, this discussion concentrates specifically on developments within England. Should you wish to potter around the realm of post-Brexit agricultural policy in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland and the differences between them, I suggest you turn to these texts as guides (Greer and Grant, 2023; Coe and Uberoi, 2023). We are leaving 2016 Brexit land now (it's never a good idea to stay for very long, the trees start talking to you and they have some pretty questionable opinions) and over a stile into the woods of English post-Brexit agricultural policy.

Brexit led to the creation of the 2020 Agricultural Act which. amongst other things, formed the legislative foundation upon which non-EU agricultural policy could be built. Even the smallest legislation woods are dense and easy to get lost in – we shall dwell only on the parts relevant to this thesis. Direct payments, previously received by farmers under Pillar One of the CAP being one of these areas, were set to be reduced until their full removal in 2027. The budget previously earmarked for direct payments was reallocated towards the primary component of post-Brexit agricultural policy: Environmental Land Management Schemes (ELMs), a form of agri-environmental scheme. In 2021, the UK government stated that investment in English farming budget would be £2.4 billion annually until 2024 (DEFRA, 2021). Writing in 2023, Greer and Grant commented that although the allocated funds remained similar, this number will decline in real terms, particularly after inflation is factored in. The 2025/26 budget allocated was £2.4 billion (DEFRA, 2024a), with £2.3bn set aside for 2026-27, £2.27bn for 2027-28 and £2.25bn for 2028-29 (DEFRA, 2025a). Concerns have been raised about how effectively these funds will support farmers, especially with the recent

Iranian war causing rising input costs (Partridge, 2026). However, the amounts allocated following the 2025 government Spending Review have been largely positively received, representing more than was anticipated (Case, 2025; NFU, 2025a; Horton and Stacey, 2025).

This new model intends to create an agricultural system where farm businesses are "profitable and economically sustainable without subsidy" (DEFRA, 2020a: 7). The new approach operates under a 'public money for public goods' logic (Kam et al., 2023) and technically, funds are open to any actor who is able to deliver rural public goods (Greer and Grant, 2023). Farmers are remunerated for the production of public goods – non-excludable and non-rival goods – which they may be unable (or unwilling) to otherwise supply (Hodge, 2000). The 'public goods' in question are recreational areas, a healthy rural environment, lower greenhouse gas emissions, and the preservation of cultural landscapes, outlining changing perceptions over the purpose of agriculture (Cusworth and Dodsworth, 2021). Agri-environmental schemes, as we saw in Section 3, are not inherently new to agricultural policy, but have not previously formed such a central component. Therefore, whilst this thesis sometimes uses the phrase 'post-Brexit agricultural policy' as shorthand for these changes, it is important to note that they represent a scaling up of long-standing trends within European agricultural policy.

ELMS is comprised of three schemes, three newly planted saplings in this forest: the Sustainable Farming Incentive (SFI), which offers payment for environmentally friendly practices which operate alongside food production; Countryside Stewardship, which rewards more complex land management that is environmentally beneficial and/or contributes to climate change mitigation; and Landscape Recovery, a scheme which funds "bespoke, longer-term, larger scale projects to enhance the natural environment" (DEFRA, 2023a) using both public and private sources (NFU, 2024). The SFI is aimed at everyday farming practices (e.g. reducing pesticide use), Countryside Stewardship encourages "targeted conservation efforts" (e.g. habitat creation) (White, 2024), and Landscape Recovery is for larger and more collaborative projects. When ELMS was announced, it was outlined as operating across three levels:

"*[level] one would encourage farmers to adopt environmentally sustainable farming and forestry practices, while farmers, foresters and other land managers in [level] two would*

focus on delivering locally-targeted environmental outcomes. The third [level] would pay for larger-scale, transformational projects—such as restoring peatland"[2] (DEFRA, 2020b)

The Countryside Stewardship Scheme contains mid- and higher-tiers. Within Countryside Stewardship, mid-tier is designed for most farmers and land managers to support general environmental protection and enhancement. In contrast, high-tier focuses on more complex environmental management agreements that deliver significant benefits in priority conservation areas (RPA, 2022). Besides ELMS, there is further funding being developed to support farm productivity and innovation, and to promote better animal health and welfare standards, but these are not addressed in detail here (Coe and Uberoi, 2023).

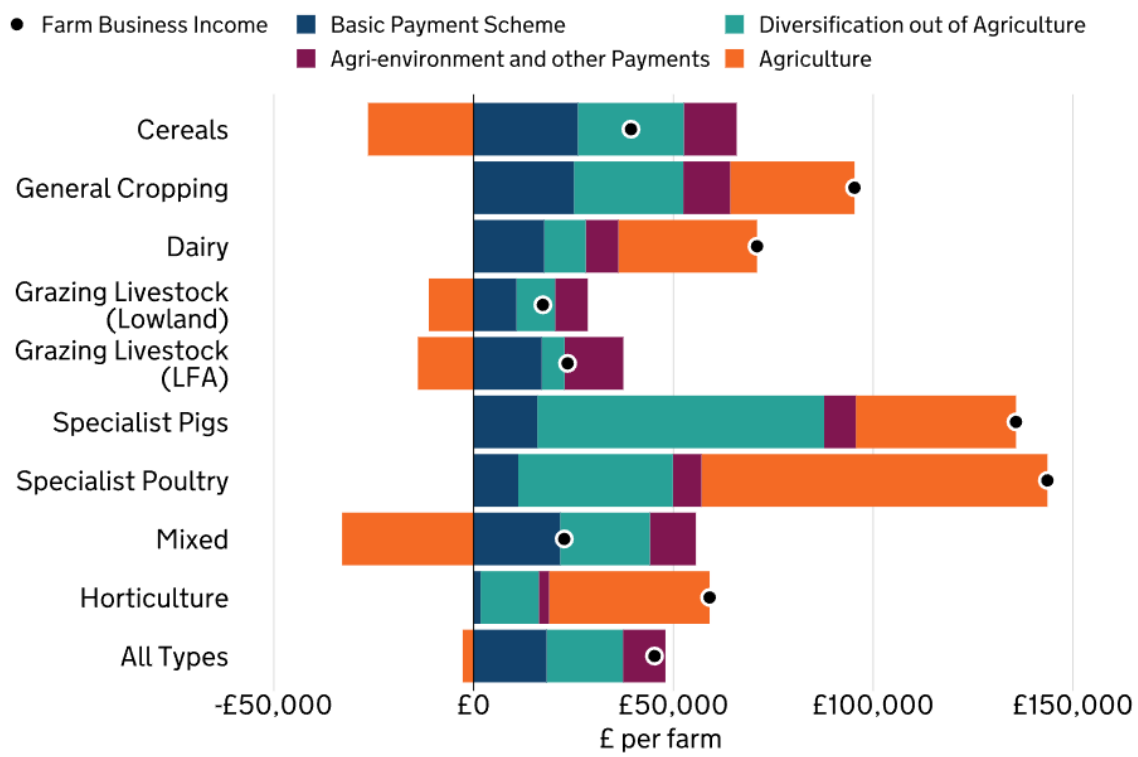


Figure 1: Cost breakdown for Farm Business Income by farm type, 2023/24. Source: DEFRA (2025b)

There have been some changes to ELMS since its announcement. The Countryside Stewardship scheme was originally intended to be replaced with a Local Nature Recovery scheme. However, in 2024 this plan was changed and the Countryside Stewardship scheme would remain, but would be adapted to include more nature recovery elements (Scott, 2024).

[2] This quotation originally said 'tiers' instead of 'levels'. However, the Countryside Stewardship Scheme and Landscape Recovery Scheme also contain 'tiers' within them. The language of 'tiers' is still used within policy documents on these schemes, whereas the use of 'tiers' to describe ELMS in general was only used when it was initially announced. For this reason, and to avoid confusion, I have changed 'tiers' to 'levels'. Confusion and lack of clarity were critiques of ELMS when it was initially announced – see DEFRA, 2021: 17 – and this example speaks to this.

This includes the 'Countryside Stewardship Plus' scheme which aims to "reward farmers for taking coordinated action, working with neighbouring farms and landowners to support climate and nature aims" (Hughes, 2023). The term 'nature recovery' is also a broadly used term to define a particular type of policy direction – which can make reading certain policy documents a little confusing at first. Whilst the inherent nature of these policies is not novel, "the speed and scale of the overhaul" is significant (Cusworth and Dodsworth, 2021: 930). Direct payments formed a significant proportion of farm business income, and still does, although there is variation depending on farm type (see Figure 1).

5.1 Criticisms of Post-Brexit Agricultural Policy

The loss of income from these policy changes has raised serious concerns for the viability of UK agriculture (Hubbard et al., 2018). Drawing on 2021 data, Franks (2022) estimates that 25-33% of UK farmers would be unable to continue operating without substantial changes to their income, with mixed and grazing farms facing particularly high levels of risk. The relatively short adjustment period within which direct payments are reduced has been noted as a particularly important aspect of these concerns (Cusworth and Dodsworth, 2021: 930). At the time of departure from the EU, 42% of UK farms would not have been profitable without income from Basic Payment Schemes (NAO, 2019).

The importance of direct payments to farm business income is particularly salient given the economic pressures farmers face, as achieving profitability through food production alone is often difficult, especially for – as indicated in Figure 1 – cereals, livestock grazing and mixed farms (Jack and Hammans, 2022). Whilst the total budget for ELMs is equivalent to that allocated for the previous Basic Payments Scheme, how much of this budget will be acquired by farmers is debated. One source found that "at best, farmers will be able to make up about a third of BPS through ELMs" (Landzettel, 2021) and concern has been raised about how 'income foregone' is calculated (DEFRA, 2021). Some changes have been made in response to these critiques, such as an increase in payment rates for SFI and Countryside Stewardship schemes (Scott, 2024), as well as increasing payments for uplands farms and allowing more frequent payments which better suit tenant and smaller farms (DEFRA, 2024b).

The higher tiers of Countryside Stewardship and Landscape Recovery have been critiqued on the grounds that they open up farmland to private markets (Tilzey, 2024). Whilst both tiers are part funded with public money, they are both designed to encourage private finance involvement (DEFRA, 2023b; Dewally et al., 2025). With the price of English farmland

already so high, Countryside Stewardship and Landscape Recovery can be argued to encourage the purchase of land by large corporations and/or private equity firms as both a capital sink, a real asset, and an opportunity for claiming public money for public goods or via offset schemes (Heron et al., 2023). Both Heron et al. (2023) and Lever et al. (2025) have linked this to Brett Christophers' theory of "the new enclosures" (2018) where land ownership becomes concentrated in the hands of a small, wealthy elite. It is worth noting however, that previous policy under the CAP was also criticised for essentially paying landowners for owning land (White, 2024).

The SFI has faced critique for displaying a failure to understand the reasons why environmentally damaging farming practices occur. As will be explored later in this thesis (Chapters 6 and 7) undesirable farm practices often occur because of economic necessity, rather than a lack of care (Wheeler et al., 2018). The diversity in how the SFI will be experienced by upland versus lowland farmers has also been critiqued. This is because the amount paid out by the SFI is based on "income forgone plus costs" (Baker, 2024) which means lowland farmers, who earn more for their produce overall, are thus able to claim more than their uplands counterparts. This has been framed as a counterproductive move for land management on a macro-level, as argued by Heron et al. (2023): "it is better to encourage producers on the less productive uplands to focus on ecosystem repair than it is to encourage producers in the more productive lowlands". The result of this could see upland farmers being expected to improve their practices for less money (Lever et al., 2025: 201). The voluntary nature of the SFI means that some individuals may continue to farm in an environmentally damaging manner, so long as their bottom line remains unaffected by 'lost' income from no engagement with the SFI. It may be more financially productive for some farmers to continue with harmful practices, diversify out of food production or leave the industry (Attorp and Hubbard, 2023; DEFRA, 2021). The general and explicit omission of food production from incentive payments was a particular concern expressed by farm groups in response to these policy changes (Coe and Uberoi, 2023; Tilzey, 2024).

A key critique of the creation of post-Brexit agricultural policy is related to "what knowledge is drawn upon to shape or change policy" (Coulson and Milbourne, 2022: 131; see also Brown et al., 2021). ELMS was intended to be a policy 'co-designed' with stakeholders, but research has found significant limitations to the reality of this co-design, specifically: a lack of stakeholder decision-making power; barriers to knowledge sharing; lack of transparency regarding the impact of stakeholder inputs; limited sharing of scheme details (Little et al.,

2022). Both the NFU and the CLA were identified as influential actors within the policy design process, which, whilst representative of some farmers, overlooks the interests of smaller-scale and/or 'alternative' farmers (Coulson and Milbourne, 2022: 131).

6. Reflexivity Hill

When I first walked this way, I emerged slightly frazzled from the dense woods of agricultural policy and began dragging myself up this hill, towards the next proper leg of my PhD, the fieldwork. The omission of 'on the ground' perspectives which formed part of the post-productivism critique covered in Section 4 and the limited co-design of post-Brexit agricultural policy informed the way I planned to conduct this fieldwork. I wanted to understand what farmers felt about these policy changes. The exact details of this are laid out in the methodology section of this thesis – Chapter 3.

A more phenomenological account of my fieldwork experience is given in Chapter 4. To avoid repeating myself too much, I will summarise that three broad points emerged from this process: the deep and caring connection farmers had with their work; that farmers had much more to say about their experience than could be neatly tied into a policy-related bundle; and some serious reflections about what the 'point' of my research was. Trying to make sense of my field interactions (which felt increasingly divorced from the framings I had been given by my initial literature review) during and following the summer spent interviewing English farmers, I engaged with literature on relational ontologies. I found that they uncovered important implications for my research. As we walk up this hill, I will tell you a little bit about this literature – I am not a fan of walking up hills, and the distraction will do me good.

6.1 Relational Approaches to Research Practice

The 'relational turn' within academia encompasses a broad range of philosophical underpinnings and approaches (Walsh et al., 2021; West et al., 2020; Vásquez-Fernández, 2020), not all of which I shall cover here (this hill is not high enough!). Speaking *very* broadly, relational thinking views the relationships between entities as fundamental to the entities themselves (Wildman, 2006: 1, cited in Walsh et al., 2021) from an ontological perspective. Epistemologically speaking, this means seeing knowledge as a practice done with others, including the 'other' that is studied (Brigg, 2016; Country et al., 2016). Knowledge production is thus always a relational endeavour, which troubles the subject/object divide seen in 'traditional' Western thought.

6.1.1 Indigenous Perspectives

Relational ontologies have long been articulated within a range of Indigenous knowledge traditions (Todd, 2016). Although this thesis does not claim to be doing Indigenous research, it remains important to note the ways these theoretical works have 'touched' my understanding and implementation of relationality, and to offer philosophical credit that is so often ignored. The term 'Indigenous' covers a broad range of experiences and geographies, and I do not attempt to encompass them all here (Mohawk, 2010; Fixico, 2013). I briefly present the Indigenous scholarship that informed my developing understanding of relationality and thus shaped my reflections on the roles and responsibilities of the researcher, how knowledge was being created through my fieldwork experience, and how that knowledge should be interpreted and presented.

Gould et al. (2023) foreground three core elements present across many Indigenous perspectives; that humanity is in an obligated relationship with the non-human world ('Natural Law'), that the 'collective' (which goes beyond the human) must be served by research, and that a relational ontology must also inform other 'ologies' in research design. Researchers must consider their motives (Martinez, 2014: 10) and be accountable to their relations, showing responsibility throughout their research practice (Latulippe, 2015: 5). Eber Hampton, a Chickasaw researcher, wrote a markedly powerful piece – "Memory Comes Before Knowledge: Research May Improve if Researchers Remember Their Motives" – on his experience of academic practice. His work foregrounds the role of emotions within researching, arguing that:

"*Emotionless, passionless, abstract, intellectual, academic research is a goddamn lie, it does not exist. It is a lie to ourselves and a lie to other people. Humans – feeling, living, breathing, thinking humans – do research*" (1995: 52).

This perspective was particularly influential for me, especially as honesty became a key motivation for how this thesis is written, in particular the methodological paper drawn from my fieldwork experience (Chapter 4). Majority[3] Indigenous perspectives on relationality and responsibility in relation to research practice argue that traditional research practice embodies an extractivist approach (Tuck and Yang, 2012). In this way, the researcher relies on the

[3] I use 'majority' as it is the terminology used within literature (Tynan, 2021). This phrasing is presumably used to avoid presenting Indigenous philosophies as one homogenous block whilst also acknowledging the frequency of relationality across the heterogenous Indigenous groups.

knowledges of others without attribution or sharing the benefits of research with that group (Tynan, 2021). The "McDonaldisation" of Indigenous methodology – where such knowledge traditions are over-simplified and the author makes little effort to reflect on what these approaches ask of them – has been noted (Foley, 2018; Tynan, 2021). These perspectives are included here because they did influence my thinking on how I wanted to practice my research and prompted reflections on what this might mean for my practice. This thesis arguably falls short of the expectations Indigenous research places on practitioners, but to omit the influence of these texts on my reflexivity would further epistemic injustice (Gould et al., 2023: 2). I reference them here as influences on my reflexive thinking, rather than frameworks I claim to enact or as an attempt to present an authoritative perspective on these articulations of relationality.

6.1.2 Feminist Perspectives

The relationality of knowledge production is something discussed within philosophies of science literature, particularly Science and Technology Studies (STS), and has been influential within feminist literature. The woods of the philosophies of science, STS, and feminist approaches to scholarship are fascinating and wonderful places to get lost, but we are not going to visit in depth right now (Latour, 1999; Rose, 1997; Sismondo, 2011). To give a non-exhaustive overview, this body of work saw feminist critiques of objectivity and 'value-free' scientific practice (Harding, 2015). These perspectives argue that objectivity within scientific practice is asserted to such a degree that practitioners have "claimed to have transcended time, space, and specific social address" (Campbell, 2016: 300). The call was made for science in pursuit of social justice, rather than in pursuit of abstract knowledge which (however unknowingly) risks reproducing injustices by dictating what is 'important' to research (Harding, 2015: 19). Various feminist epistemological perspectives have come from these discussions – including standpoint theory (Harding, 1991), intersectional analysis (Crenshaw, 1989) and situated knowledge (Haraway, 1988). Haraway's "situated knowledge" was a significant text for me at this time. She coined the term "situated knowledges" as a framework for positioning the researcher in relation to the object of study, in a manner which foregrounds the "pragmatic reality of diversity" (Sismandan, 2019: 130) when it comes to the various 'views' we will all have of the world. Situated knowledges contests the idea of truly objective, universal knowledge. It stresses the contextual nature of 'facts' where the idea of "reality as it really is" is actually contingent on various norms,

methods of practice, and/or how one attempts to engage with and understand this reality (Thompson, 2001).

Feminist and post-colonial literature has outlined how the act of research is inherently a political act (Held, 2023: 96). Situating knowledge has been foregrounded as a political act where the 'curtain' is pulled back from the process of research (Gilbert, 1994: 90) through transparent communication and acts of reflexivity and positional disclosure (Moralli, 2024). Thinking on my 'role' as a researcher and the centrality of care within farming led me to the 'care ethics' body of literature, which stems from feminist relational ontologies (Tronto, 1993, 2013, 2015; McEwan and Goodman, 2010; Lawson, 2009). We will venture down the footpath of Care Ethics in Section 8.2, and so I will focus here on the epistemological implications of care ethics rather than a broader overview. Care stresses the mutual interdependency of humanity and calls for an understanding of ethics and morality which centres this relational understanding of human nature (Tronto, 2015: 263). Ethics from this perspective, for example, posits that "the question is not whether a lie is right or wrong as an absolute truth, but rather how lying impacts ongoing relationships" (Hamington, 2015: 277). Within research, this looks like moving away from an extractivist approach to research and embracing the role of affective and emotional qualities within scholarship (Moralli, 2024) – as I discuss further in Chapter 4.

6.2 Implications for this Research

I reached the top of this hill following my interviews, like we do now. I sat here and looked out at the literature I had come from and through, and the participants I had worked/walked with in my fieldwork process. The view stretches far and wide, and I could see my time as an undergraduate and master's student and the initial reasons I pursued research out in the distance. As we stand here, perhaps you can see your own unique journey too. On another day, you are welcome to guide me on such a walk and tell me a story of your own (Cardwell, 2023: 17). Hills are an excellent place for thinking – there's something about looking down on a spatial view that prompts a sort of internal, temporal 'looking back'. When I first walked this way, I looked back – externally and internally – and came to some conclusions about how I felt I should go forward. The details of this are outlined in Chapter 4, but I will summarise some aspects of them now, although it requires that I tell you less about literature and more about myself, which I promise is relevant rather than purely narcissistic (Delamont, 2009).

I've historically dealt with less-than-ideal mental health and I had a fair deal of contact with psychiatric services in my early 20s (bloody hell, you might be thinking, I thought this was meant to be nice walk). I remember in primary school people (including myself) would say "Ooh, you're going to be put in the loony bin" if someone was acting a bit strange. I had no idea what this meant at the time and pictured in my mind some sort of council issued wheelie bin intended for the mentally ill. It was always green, in this mental image, and when I pictured myself inside of it, it smelled like grass clippings. Well, when I ended up in the loony bin at 20 and then again at 21, I was pleased to find that it wasn't a green wheelie bin. My engagement with these services was absolutely needed and I was willing (read: desperate) to receive that healthcare. Anyway, to cut a long story short, I did a whole lot of work and engaged with a range of therapy modalities. I ended up working part-time as a lived experience mental health practitioner (Toikko, 2016; Cleary and Armour, 2022), co-running a group therapy modality called 'Democratic Therapeutic Communities' (Pearce and Haigh, 2017). Actually, by the time the Viva for this thesis comes around, I'll be working part time as a more 'classic' mental health practitioner, something I feel would only have been possible with the experiences I gained as a Lived Experience worker. Democratic Therapeutic Communities work with a flatter hierarchy, where service users and staff members are on more equal footing. This was something I took into my research and this experience was, alongside the value of 'grounded' actor perspectives covered in Section 4, a reason for wanting to centre the lived experience of farmers in my work.

Being engaged with the mental health sphere, both personally and professionally, unfortunately involves witnessing the much more problematic aspects of the current system. People often leave treatment having to heal from the treatment they received there, rather than (or as well as) their initial mental illness (Adame, 2013). There are many perspectives on what is 'wrong' with the current system and what should be done differently, with some advocating for reform and others desiring liberation from the system as a whole (Hölling, 2001). This isn't a debate I'm going to enter into now, but at this point, looking out on these views, I realised that as I progressed to the data analysis stage of my PhD, I was at risk of treating the perspectives given in my interviews similarly to how psychiatric science often treats patients; as artefacts to be "collected, analysed, made sense of, and authorized" (Spyrou, 2024: 5). This is a thesis primarily about, and for, people, and I was at risk of treating these people as objects (Smith, 1992: 91). I found that reflecting and writing about

these reflexive considerations revealed insights into the role of emotions within knowledge production - something covered in Chapter 4.

My foray into philosophies of relationality and care ethics, and my realisation that I may risk reproducing an extractivist relationship with participants, prompted me to pause. If I consider myself, which I do, to be in relationship with those impacted by my research, then this relationship infuses me with responsibility. I decided it was more ethical from a relational stance to 'relax' the initial scope of my research aims. Farmers did have things to say about policy, and these perspectives are present in this thesis, but they had more to say about the impact of the market on their practice. I therefore turned to grounded theory in order to analyse my data (Glaser and Strauss, 1967), to allow the most prominent themes to come forward from the 'bottom-up' rather than the 'top-down'. Thankfully, my original intentions to centre farmer voices and the conversational, participant led style of my interviews allowed this to be possible. I explore the implications of this on a methodological level further in Chapter 3.

Another implication for my research that materialised on Reflexivity Hill is that I realised that I also have a responsibility towards the readers of my work, and towards myself, which impact how I tell the 'story' of this research process. I wanted to be honest. I could have – and I did consider – done some sort of retrofitting of research aims and scope. However, this was at odds with the core messages of the relationality literature I had engaged with and enacts harms towards my relationships with participants, with you, and with myself. I wouldn't be doing a very good job of flattening the hierarchy between researcher and researched if I wasn't being honest. This is also my justification for the writing style present in large parts of this thesis. As academics, our written communication tends to follow a particular "paradigmatic" style (Bruner, 2009). There is good reason for this: traditional academic papers are written largely with the intent to communicate scientific 'facts' and this style prioritises this (Bruner, 2009: 12). The papers which make up Chapters 5, 6 and 7 are written in this 'traditional' style, as I understand the value of this within these contexts.

I also write in this way in those Chapters as I believe good writers consider how receptive their intended audience is to particular linguistic choices and because, to be blunt, this is the particular writing style that is "in a language that power understands" (Handler, 1991, cited in Castree, 2003) and therefore, in a PhD, is expected. Literature on infusing relationality into research practices notes that the traditional academic communication style may not be the

ideal, but it is, at present, necessary (Gould et al., 2023: 7). For the other parts of this thesis however, I wanted to write in a way that allows me to really communicate the meaning of this work – that, ultimately, this is research about people, written by a person, and intended for other people. Writing in a more conversational, creative style holds this meaning better. I also, as I have already stressed, wanted to be honest, and I wanted to be authentic. Honestly, this is how I authentically write. Most papers of mine begin in a conversational tone and I work around writing blocks by switching back to this style. Most of the time, the content is then 'edited' to take a more traditional academic form but, for large parts of this thesis, I have elected, for political, ethical and epistemic reasons, not to write myself out.

Before we start our walk down this hill, it's important to discuss ways in which this thesis is not totally aligned with the literature I have just covered. Firstly, I speak about wanting to flatten the hierarchy between researcher, researched and reader. However, whilst I believe this hierarchy is flattened in this thesis, I do not claim that I have totally bulldozed it. I still retain a privileged position by the very fact that I designed this research and ultimately have final say over how the data is presented and understood (McLafferty, 1995: 437; Nast, 1994). Secondly, what 'counts' as relational research is very varied (Walsh et al., 2021). By some yardsticks, this research, because it is anthropocentric and does not centre the more-than-human and/or materiality of agriculture, is limited in its relational scope (Puig de la Bellacasa, 2017: 194). These are criticisms I am happy to accept – all research must have its scope, its situated context, as Haraway argued (1988). Attempting to frame interviews with farmers as about anything other than human perspectives (even if it includes references to non-human relations), would do an injustice to participants, to more-than-human scholarship, and it would be a lie.

Shall we keep on walking?

7. Non-governmental Influences: the role of retailers in UK agriculture

I have noted that interviewees frequently mentioned the economic context when discussing their lived experience of farming. As we move into the present-day of this walk, it is helpful to briefly address this broader economic context. All of this occurs within a wider reality, which is a capitalist agri-food system that does not properly value food (or much at all, in my opinion). Once more, for the sake of our legs, we will not go down into that field too much – see Holt Giménez (2017) if this is something that interests you. Here, we will focus on the particular economic structure of agri-food markets in the UK. Within the UK specifically,

agricultural producers are facing an 'economic squeeze' caused by both lower commodity prices and higher input costs (Taverner, 2025; AHDB, 2022). Although productivity and efficiency have improved, UK agriculture continues to experience persistent financial instability, falling real incomes, narrow and uneven profit margins, and little influence over pricing within an agri-food system that is increasingly shaped by large, powerful corporations (Barlow and Lostak, 2023; Food Foundation, 2025; Seth and Randell, 2020; Jack and Hammans, 2022). Farmers, especially those operating smaller and less visible businesses, occupy the vulnerable position of price and contract takers, rather than makers (Barlow and Lostak, 2023).

What is interesting about the productivism/post-productivism literature discussed in Section 4 is the relative omission of the rise in corporate dominance over agri-food systems. This 'gap' is something addressed in Chapter 5 of this thesis. This omission became apparent to me through interviews, where farmers repeatedly stressed the impact of supermarkets on their practice. With 98% of food in the UK being purchased from supermarkets, the role of these retailers is important to consider (Hasnain et al., 2020). Let us explore the land of supermarkets then, which is ideal timing, as we are about halfway through this walk and I am getting peckish.

Retailers are a key 'type' of corporate actor which dominate agri-food supply chains, generating their own arena of academic discussion (Clapp, 2021; Burch and Lawrence, 2007). There are two important things to discuss when it comes to the role of food retailers in global, and specifically British, supply chains: retailer consolidation and buying power, and the increase in 'private standards'.

7.1 Retailer Consolidation and Buying Power

The transition from specialist shops to supermarkets as the dominant retail format began in the 1950s, accelerating in the 1960s (Hamlett et al., 2008). By 2025, the six leading retailers named above operated around 9,000 stores across the UK (Danielle, 2025). These six retailers are the 'big four' (Tesco, Sainsburys, ASDA, Morrisons) and the discount retailers Aldi and Lidl. Together, these retailers hold 82.5% of the market share, outlining the oligopolistic nature of UK food retail (Danielle, 2025). As the UK imports the majority of its fruit and vegetables (while importing a smaller proportion of meat; see FSA, 2022), domestic farmers increasingly compete to supply these large retailers, which wield significant buying power and operate global sourcing networks (Seth and Randell, 2020). These retailers act

simultaneously as purchasers of agricultural produce, as sellers of services to suppliers (including packaging, promotional activity and shelf space), and as competitors to branded manufacturers through the expansion of own-brand lines (Dobson, 2004). The high level of market concentration enables supermarkets to leverage their dominant position to exert downward pressure on prices and, in some cases, engage in coercive or aggressive supplier negotiations (Towill, 2005: 437; Hingley, 2005). The oligopolistic control of the food chain by supermarkets (and large corporations in general) allows them to dictate terms unilaterally.

Two adjudicators have been established in the UK to try and respond to this structural inequality and problematic retailer behaviour. The first, the Groceries Code Adjudicator (GCA) was established in 2013. Since its establishment, the Groceries Code Adjudicator (GCA) has conducted 13 adjudications between 2013 and 2024 (GCA, 2024: 12). However, submitting a complaint requires farmers to possess detailed knowledge of complex contractual and regulatory provisions, as "the devil is in the detail" when navigating policy and supply agreements (Smith, 2015: 10). Many farmers are also reluctant to initiate formal action due to concerns about potential commercial repercussions (Shears, 2013: 60; Burch and Lawrence, 2007). Although the GCA has delivered short-term benefits for producers who raise disputes, longer-term uncertainties regarding future contracts remain (Hurst et al., 2024: 4). As of 2025, the GCA has undertaken only two formal investigations — into Tesco in 2015 and the Co-op in 2018 — and has yet to impose a financial penalty on any retailer (Malik, 2025). In 2023, a petition was launched for the GCA to be reformed as it failed to protect and cover all of the contracts from the farm gate (Malik, 2025). The Agricultural Supply Chain Adjudicator (ASCA) was subsequently established, enabled by the 2020 Agricultural Act (DEFRA, 2024c). The ASCA goes further than the GCA, applying regulations to businesses which purchase from farmers directly. However, at present, only milk and pigs are covered by the ASCA (NFU, 2025b). Whilst there are more contracts included in this legislation, many of the original criticisms levelled at the GCA remain - contract and policy complexity, fear of repercussions, a lack of anonymity for producers.

7.2 Private Standards

Within an industry with lower profit margins and a highly concentrated market, food retailers seek methods to differentiate themselves from their competitors (Busch and Bain, 2004). Lower commodity prices are one method of differentiation, marking the success of 'discount retailers' such as Aldi and Lidl, but product quality has also become a useful tool (Konefal et

al., 2005). Assurance schemes and private standards have become a key method for pursuing an "economy of quality" for supermarkets (Konefal et al., 2005: 292; Bingen and Siyengo, 2002). These schemes and standards also work to reduce transaction costs, with food retailers possessing significant information on production processes, enabling consistency and efficiency (Jones and Hill, 1994).

Since the 1990s, supermarkets have become increasingly powerful within the agri-food market, moving from 'just' retail and into food processing and the supply of 'own-brand' products (Busch and Bain, 2004; Burch et al., 2012; Burch and Lawrence, 2007). Moving into these areas provides further incentives for supermarkets to deploy quality assurance schemes as their brand becomes tied into consumer opinion of a product. Increasing consumer concerns regarding ethics and social responsibility has also become a driving force behind supermarket adoption of private standards as they become a further tool for differentiation (Busch, 2011). These schemes and standards are not statutory requirements for farmers, but they do become de facto mandatory due to how central food retailers are for the sale of farm products (Busch, 2000; Busch and Bain, 2004; Campbell et al., 2012; Campbell, 2013).

There are merits to these schemes – increasing social responsibility and retailer concern for environmental/ethical issues should not be dismissed, and work has been done to harmonise codes (e.g. via the British Retail Consortium) which reduces the sheer range of standards farmers must comply with (Richards et al., 2013). However, there are significant issues with the "cascade of codes" which retailers have disseminated (Kolk and van Tulder, 2005: 7). There is concern that the environmental benefit of these codes is lower than retailers suggest (Fuchs and Kalfagianni, 2010) and these codes often disadvantage Global South producers (Fuchs et al., 2009). Issues of legitimacy have also been identified, as decision-making processes regarding the content of these codes are often opaque and lack accountability (Konefal et al., 2005). Additionally, a lack of clearly defined benchmarks for these codes makes evaluating overall efficacy difficult (Fuchs and Kalfagianni, 2010). Farmers often lack influence over the content of these codes, despite their significance to farm practice (Konefal et al., 2005: 299) and scholars have raised concerns about how these schemes and standards influence the overall governance of agri-food systems, with governance moving from the public to the private sphere (Friedberg, 2007). This becomes increasingly concerning when states outsource standard setting to private corporations and market power becomes increasingly akin to regulatory power (Fuchs and Kalfagianni, 2010; Richards et al., 2013).

The dominance of supermarkets within supply chains also makes them powerful influencers on the policy level (Clapp, 2021; The Food Foundation, 2025), something particularly relevant given the UK's weak lobbying regulation (Crepaz and Worthy, 2025).

8. Frameworks for Understanding Agricultural Practice and Change

The omission of retailers from the productivism to post productivism discussions allowed me to connect my initial literature review from the pre-fieldwork part of this hike to the data gathered. As I have mentioned, I used grounded theory to draw out prominent themes from the interview data (this will be discussed in more detail in my methods chapter, Chapter 3). With grounded theory as a compass, and the interview data acting as a sort of magnetic field to guide me, I roamed around various spaces. I found two particular avenues which allowed me to coax deeper analysis out of my transcripts and amplify the perspectives uncovered. We shall travel down these two footpaths now – first into the 'good farmer' literature and then into agri-care ethics.

8.1 The 'Good Farmer' Identity

Literature which uses the 'good farmer' identity framing has been successful because of its ability to unpick how culture operates within farming communities. This has allowed for analysis of how farmers may resist and/or adapt to change, making it a powerful tool for understanding 'on-the-ground' behaviour and the values which underlie practice. The majority of 'good farmer' research is done in relation to the Western world, but the term has been used in non-Western contexts, although with some differences between what is valued and how this is identified in these contexts (Pronti et al., 2025).

The phrase 'good farmer' has a substantial history which extends beyond academic usage (see Burton et al., 2021). However, the phrase has gathered significant traction within agrarian and rural studies. In the 1990s, literature began to note the term's cultural potency (Fairweather and Keating, 1994; Phillips and Gray, 1995; Harrison et al., 1998), with Burton and colleagues acknowledging Tsouvalis et al. (2000) as the likely first text to utilise the term within a theoretical framing (2021: 3). Drawing on precision farming and the use of yield maps, Tsouvalis et al. developed the notion of 'knowledge-cultures' to understand how certain types of knowledge are deemed "legitimate" and "useful" within specific groups (2000: 913). Knowledge-cultures are not a form of knowledge, but rather how knowledge is deemed meaningful, framed as "knowing-from-within" (2000: 912). A knowledge-culture:

"*does not inform people that capitalism is a mode of production or how to play chess, but provides a means for the interaction with others that instructs them about the cultural significance capitalism or chess has for the community of which they are a part*" (Tsouvalis et al., 2000: 912).

Drawing on Bourdieu's social theory, which shall be explored below, Tsouvalis et al. presented knowledge cultures as that which provides an individual with a 'feel for the game', acting as device that takes forms of knowledge and integrates them into "one's practical, everyday undertakings" (2000: 912). This text was the first to combine 'good farmer' as a conceptual tool with Bourdieu's theoretical framing. As the 'good farmer' concept developed a stronger standing within agrarian studies, knowledge-cultures has served as a useful theoretical tool for research which seeks to understand the tensions between agri-environmental schemes composed by knowledges external to the farming world (policy) and on-the-ground farming cultures (Morris, 2006; Riley, 2016a).

Following Tsouvalis et al.'s initial use of the term as an analytical concept, Burton advanced its development through his research on farming identity. In this work, the notion of the 'good farmer' emerged as a key explanation for why many farmers did not regard forestry as equivalent to farming (Burton, 2004a). This 2004 paper has become a significant 'anchor point' when tracing the concept's usage as an analytical tool in relevant disciplines (Burton et al., 2021: 4-5). The term has now become an important conceptual tool for understanding farmer behaviour, particularly in relation to resistance towards agri-environmental schemes (Burton and Paragahawewa, 2011; Riley, 2016a; Cusworth and Dodsworth, 2021), exploring how the increased 'multifunctionality' of agriculture is unfolding in-situ (Saunders, 2016), and understanding how broader agrarian transformations are being experienced (Haggerty et al., 2009).

This has occurred alongside the 'cultural turn' within social science, where greater attention has been paid towards how culture, meaning, symbols and discourses produce social life (Cloke, 1997). Within agrarian studies, there has been much critique of literature which frames farming as a purely economic endeavour. Gasson's (1973) text, which found that intrinsic values motivated farmers much more than instrumental ones, is often noted as an influential reference point in these critiques (Hill and Bradley, 2024). Economic drivers are still understood to be important, specifically regarding short-term considerations (Garforth and Rehman, 2006), but there is increased awareness that reducing farmers to actors whose

behaviour can be understood solely with reference to economic factors is a limited approach (Jakobsen, 2017; Kristensen and Jakobsen, 2011). The 'good farmer' concept has thus been particularly useful in widening this scope (Burton, 2004a; Burton, 2004b) beyond an understanding of farmers as 'homo economicus' (Wilson, 2008: 369).

This does not mean that economics does not influence farming practice – as we saw in Section 7. Indeed, within the 'good farmer' literature being profitable has been identified as a core component of being a 'good farmer' (Topp et al., 2024; Sutherland, 2013) although it is not the sole value within this rubric (Sutherland, 2013; Burton et al., 2008). Productivism, discussed above in Section 4, has been noted as particularly influential within farming culture (Silvasti, 2003; Cusworth and Dodsworth, 2021; Topp et al., 2024; Saunders, 2016; McGuire et al., 2015; Saugeres, 2002), although, as shall be explored later, there is both continuity and change regarding the productivist mindset within farming cultures (Saunders, 2016; Cusworth and Dodsworth, 2021; Burton et al., 2021). Research which analyses the 'good farmer' identity and productivism often focuses on how productivist symbols become expressed in the farm landscape, via preferences for symbols which communicate high yield and thus increased profit (Burton et al., 2008; Burton et al., 2021). These symbols are those such as specific crop types, 'tidy' farming, farm and machinery size and specific livestock traits (Burton and Paragahawewa, 2011; Stock, 2007; Sutherland and Burton, 2011; Burton, 2004a; Burton et al., 2008).

'Good farmer' is an analytical concept rather than a theoretical one (Burton et al., 2021: 67), meaning that the use of the concept is combined with a theoretical approach in research. Bourdieu's social theory is the most common theoretical framing used to accompany the term 'good farmer', although other valuable approaches have also been used, some in conjunction with Bourdieu's work - symbolic interactionism (Silvasti, 2003; Burton and Wilson, 2006), practice theory (Huttunen and Peltomaa, 2016), and non-representational theory (Vigors et al., 2023) to name a few. This thesis uses a Bourdieusian approach. This approach is chosen because it allows for analysis between 'macro'-level pressures (such as the policies and retailer influences discussed above) and the ground-level dimensions of culture.

8.1.1 Bourdieu's Social Theory and the 'Good Farmer' Identity

Bourdieu developed his social theory as a means to examine how actors exercise agency within, and in relation to, broader structural and cultural constraints. Relevant to the 'good farmer' literature are three central aspects of Bourdieu's work – field, habitus, and capital.

‘Field’ refers to the unique social spaces we all inhabit. A ‘game’ analogy is often used to explain Bourdieu’s work, with ‘field’ representing the structure within which a game is played, according to specific ‘rules of the game’. In Bourdieu’s framework, actors compete for dominance within the specific fields they reside in and this is done through capital accumulation (discussed below), understood via an individual’s habitus. Bourdieu described habitus as a “system of long lasting and transposable dispositions which, integrating past experiences, function at every moment as a matrix of perceptions, appreciations and actions” (Bourdieu, 1977: 82). Rather than seeing individuals as lacking in autonomy, habitus allows us to view individuals’ adherence to certain rules as something logically motivated, retaining a sense of agency on the individual level whilst not underestimating the impact of social structures on the decisions individuals make. One’s habitus is the lens through which they see the world, developed over time and through experience. Habitus allows us to consider the logical processes (although they are often tacit and pre-rational) which influence practice. To continue with the game metaphor, habitus allows for an individual to generate a “feel for the game” as they develop knowledge and experience of the “rules of the game” relative to the field(s) they operate within.

Whilst a habitus is long-lasting, it is not “eternal” and it evolves over time, responding to and being shaped by social fields, whose ‘rules’ are similarly subject to change (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992: 133). Habitus and field shape each other, being co-constitutive. Through the habitus, the field is perceived in a meaningful way. In turn, the habitus and the individual’s actions can shape the fields they operate within. This relational perspective of field and habitus allows habitus to be understood as “a socialized subjectivity” (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992: 127), “the social embodied” (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992: 128), an “internalized structure, the objective made subjective” (Maton, 2008: 67).

When the word ‘capital’ is used, it often conjures a purely economic concept. This solely economic framing was something Bourdieu sought to move beyond. He argued that a focus on mercantile exchange, whilst important, omitted other important forms of exchange between people and only enabled analysis of formal, institutional aspects of social life (Bourdieu, 1986). As discussed earlier, the critique of this partial approach has also been made within agrarian literature, adding further weight to the merits of Bourdieusian theory for this area of study. To deepen sociological analysis of how actors reproduce and exchange capital, and how this contributes to their social positioning, Bourdieu defined various forms of capital: economic; social; cultural. Whilst exchange between capital forms is possible,

through symbolic capital which shall be discussed below, this potential for such exchange is not necessarily equal between capital types. For example, economic capital translates more easily into other capital forms than the other way around (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977).

The logic underlying capital within Bourdieu's social theory is that actors endeavour to accumulate and reproduce various forms of capital in order to improve their social standing within a particular field. Economic capital reflects the conventional conception of capital, that which is "immediately and directly convertible into money and may be institutionalized in the form of property rights" (Bourdieu, 1986: 16). Social capital refers to the "aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to the possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalised relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition – in other words, to membership in a group – which provides each of its members with the backing of the collectively-owned capital" (Bourdieu, 1986: 21). Social capital is reproduced through social interaction and, the broader one's social network, the greater the stock of social capital available to them. However, while group membership and social ties can provide access to valuable resources, they can also generate exclusion if an individual is isolated from a particular group. This is something uncovered by Riley et al. who found that farmers showed a disinterest in cooperating with peers who they judged to be farming 'badly', fearing it would damage their own reputation and access to social capital (2018: 643). Riley (2016b) has also found that limited access to labour can impede farmers' ability to gain social capital, as it reduces their ability to help neighbouring farmers. Inversely, Sutherland et al. (2024) have found that discussing farming practice with peers allows poultry farmers to gain social capital when cultural capital, often accrued through roadside evaluation of farms, is less available to them due to the enclosed, 'hidden' nature of poultry production. Garner et al. has found that the 'good farmer' identity can encourage isolation between farmers who fear that discussing struggles related to farming may negatively impact their perception by peers (2025: 4).

Cultural capital refers to that which is culturally valued and comprises three subtypes: institutional, objectified, and embodied (Bourdieu, 1986). Institutional cultural capital refers to formally recognised credentials or certifications of competence. In an agricultural context, this may include the traits recognised by breed societies as markers of high-quality livestock (Yarwood and Evans, 2006; Holloway, 2005). Objectified cultural capital denotes material objects that hold particular value within a social group. Embodied cultural capital consists of enduring physical and cognitive dispositions developed over time through sustained practice

and experience, such as specialised skills, expertise, or forms of knowledge. The ability to appropriately judge what objects hold cultural value is itself a form of embodied cultural capital. Cultural capital allows for relationships with individuals within a specific field to be developed and reproduced, thus allowing for social capital to be generated. Cultural capital shapes the individual's habitus as it allows them to develop a "feel for the game" where capital can be recognized and valued in accordance with the "rules of the game" which occur in specific fields. Capital has a temporal aspect as it represents skills learned over time, and capital accumulation builds up over time. A farmer's reputation may be retained even after they are no longer able to engage in traditional 'good farming' performances, such as during retirement and older age (Riley, 2016b).

Finally, symbolic capital, which is not a form of capital in itself, is that which allows the conversion of different capitals. It refers to the form which various capital types take when others recognise them as legitimate (Bourdieu, 1989: 17). Ownership of economic, social or cultural capital allows for symbolic capital to be generated and operate as a means for those with a shared habitus to recognise the significance of the capital held. In her work on family farms experiencing hardship, Glover (2010) shows how symbolic capital enabled "prestige and renown" to become attached to a specific family business (Bourdieu, 1977: 179) as significant forms of capital have been displayed (via symbolic capital) over significant lengths of time to those with a shared habitus. Symbolic capital, in this context, endows the business with a level of symbolic value which operates as both a source of motivation and pressure for the survival of the family farm. Symbolic exchange can only occur between those within a shared habitus, as Bourdieu argues "for a symbolic exchange to function, the two parties must have identical categories of perception and appreciation" (Bourdieu, 1998: 100). If two individuals share the same understanding of the "rules of the game" within a social field, which they understand through their habituses, then they will recognise the same value in various capitals. This shared perception and appreciation enables symbolic capital to function.

Diversity of habitus within the farming communities leads to fragmentation regarding who is viewed as a 'good farmer' and why. For example, Hunt (2010) found that varying habituses were present within kiwifruit orchardists. This diversity meant that, whilst all participants sought after cultural capital, the type of cultural capital they aspired to embody on their land was dependent on the nature of their habitus. The embodied cultural capital displayed on the orchards would thus be 'read' and valued differently depending on if the farmer viewing the

land shared the same habitus as the occupier. Those with similar backgrounds were more likely to develop a shared habitus. Likewise, Riley (2016a) stressed the geographical diversity within farming identities, with upland farmers in the Peak District deriving cultural capital because of their more limited focus on maximizing production. High intensity, high output farming would not be geographically suited to this type of land, and attempting to farm in such a way would be seen as contextually inappropriate and read as a poor performance of skill. Sutherland and Darnhofer (2012) contend that the attributes associated with 'good farming' differ across regions and commodity production types. They further argue that as the 'rules of the game' evolve within the contemporary agricultural context, farmers' creative responses to these changes generate greater diversity in farming practices. This, in turn, broadens and diversifies the criteria by which a 'good farmer' is defined (2012: 234). Bourdieu's social theory hinges on relationality; it is only through recognition, perception, social appraisal that various forms of capital hold value. However, the various "rules" relevant to specific fields are often more tacit than overt (Wacquant, 2011), becoming internalised by individuals (Bourdieu, 1983). Habitus acts as both an "anchor" and a "compass" regarding the reproduction of capital in various forms (Wacquant, 2011: 81).

There are times when the 'rules of the game' within a field may shift and an individual's habitus, which equips them with a 'feel for the game', cannot adapt. Or, an individual may move into a new field and struggle to adapt their habitus to the new field 'rules'. When habitus and field become significantly misaligned, Bourdieu (1990) termed the result the "hysteresis effect". If an individual's habitus cannot internalise these revised or new field logics, they may find themselves unable to accumulate the symbolic capital required to secure or maintain a valued position within the field. Consequently, they may face negative sanctions and experience the "pain of exclusion" (Cusworth, 2019: 48). When field and habitus are well-matched, there is minimal need for either to change. Riley (2016a) suggests that previous understandings of the 'good farmer' identity have appeared static because there was minimal discord between habitus and field.

Bourdieu also incorporated the concept of 'taste' into his broader social theory (1984), distinguishing between a "taste of necessity" and a "taste of luxury" to explain how cultural capital is valued in relation to material conditions and modes of production. Those more removed from the practical realities of production are more likely to exhibit a "taste of luxury," whereby culturally valued goods are appreciated independently of their functionality, such as works of art. By contrast, a "taste of necessity" reflects economic constraints, with

value attached to objects that serve practical purposes. Bourdieu illustrates this through the example of cheaper, high-calorie foods being preferred among lower socio-economic groups (Bourdieu, 1984: 173). Drawing on this dimension of Bourdieu's work, Sutherland (2013) argues that modern farming culture is characterised by a "taste of necessity." As weed-free fields are associated with higher productivity and income, they acquire symbolic value as markers of 'good farming.' In this sense, it is the functional attributes of the landscape that underpin and generate its symbolic significance.

Burton et al. (2008) applied Bourdieu's framework of capital to examine farmers' resistance to agri-environmental schemes. They argue that even where financial compensation is provided, participation may result in a net loss of capital if the required practices fail to generate symbolic capital within the farming field. For example, switching the seasonal practice of cropping, where farmers were able to demonstrate embodied cultural capital through the visual display of their fields, to conservation practices, which did not display embodied cultural capital, culminated in an aggregate capital loss, disincentivising farmer engagement with such schemes (2008: 26).

Burton and Paragahawewa (2011) argue that farmers may also risk diminishing their social capital through engagement with such schemes. Conservation-oriented practices often produce more diverse and less uniform landscapes, read as 'messy' by others. With tidy farms functioning as a status symbol due to the embodied skill they make visible and their relevance to productive and profitable farming, a 'messy' landscape can suggest that a farmer lacks in valued skills, with consequences for their reputation. Drawing on the concept of knowledge-cultures developed by Tsouvalis et al. (2000), Burton and Paragahawewa argue that the prescriptive, 'top-down' nature of agri-environmental schemes prevents the potential for conservation knowledge to develop in a more localised, 'grass-roots' way. Conservation knowledge is thus unlikely to become embedded in farming knowledge-cultures if it is not somewhat 'home-grown' and co-constructed. When such knowledge lacks cultural grounding, it does not correlate to capital accumulation and thus is lacking in its ability for a practitioner to be deemed a 'good farmer' by peers.

Riley revisited farms after a ten-year period and found that engagement with agri-environmental schemes has become integrated into what is considered 'good farming', and that which would cause the 'hysteresis effect' (where *only* agri-environmental scheme involvement is considered 'good farming') has not occurred (2016a). Riley's study anchored

the temporal aspect of both the 'good farmer' identity and 'knowledge-cultures' in empirical cases, outlining how the habitus is able to adapt in response to changes in the 'rules of the game' at field level, but that this occurs over time. Without an understanding of the temporal, dynamic nature of field/habitus interplay, they can be mistakenly perceived as 'static'. Likewise, knowledge, in this case conservation knowledge relevant to agri-environmental schemes engagement, initially failed to become integrated into farming 'knowledge cultures' but integration was shown to increase over time. This work is supported by Morris (2006) who examined the contrasting knowledge cultures between policy and agrarian groups. Despite an initial mismatch between the two knowledge cultures, Morris found that the boundaries between them were porous and, with time and negotiation, there was potential for farmers and scheme officials to co-construct a shared understanding of legitimate knowledge.

8.1.2 Critiques of Bourdieusian Theory

Bourdieu's work is not without criticism and, whilst I do not offer an exhaustive account of these critiques, it is important to discuss them here. The kernel of much critique levelled against Bourdieu lies in his own claims that his theoretical ideas contained "new and radical solutions to the old theoretical problems which have persistently stumped everyone else" (Jenkins, 2024: 108). Bourdieu often critiqued a particular approach to theory but ended up repeating the same mistake (see Jenkins, 2024 for a substantive review of this). For example, he criticised theories which explained human behaviour as inherently rational and calculative (Bourdieu, 1990; Wacquant, 1989). He then presented a framework which sees individuals compete for placements within a field's hierarchy through the accumulation of capitals, presenting an underlying logic to behaviour which is rational and calculating. The issue here is not so much that the logic underlying his theory is wrong, but that he claimed this same logic was incorrect. What Bourdieu does do, which makes his work useful, is extend this logic towards extra-economic areas of life. This does have its own area of critique, such as whether Bourdieu succeeds in this as much as scholars such as Marx, and whether his understanding of 'capital' was closer to that of 'wealth' (Beasley-Murray, 2000; McCarthy and Seim, 2023). However, for the sake of *this* thesis, going down this route starts to fall more into semantics than is necessary for the task at hand.

The role of (un)consciousness has also been critiqued in his work, as he claimed that habitus operates "below the level of consciousness" (Bourdieu, 1990: 73) whilst others have argued that there is an element of conscious thought within this (Jenkins, 2024; Yang, 2014). Whilst

this is an important dynamic to tease out, it does not undermine the overall existence of these logics but rather the location where they reside. Even if, as I suspect is true, such rationale operates on a mixture of both levels depending on a variety of factors, the merits of the approach remain. Once more, the major issue here was Bourdieu's insistence on the solely unconsciousness nature of habitus which is not a perspective I claim here. It is also important to consider that humans are not solely rational beings. There is literature on farming which justifies (among other reasons) the use of relational, more-than-human and material approaches on the basis that there is much beyond the 'rational' when it comes to considering farmer behaviour (Darnhofer, 2020; Darnhofer et al., 2016). However, Darnhofer's (2020) work does not dispute the validity of work focused on understanding more 'rational' decision making but rather seeks to contribute another perspective to the field. People may not be solely rational, but they are not solely irrational either (unless they are particularly tired or hungry).

The meat of many critiques can be boiled down to the fact that Bourdieu's theories did little to explain how change occurs and why. I shall not delve too deep into these perspectives, which mainly challenge Bourdieu on the grounds of determinism, structuralism and/or notions pertaining to individual agency (Yang, 2014; King, 2000; Riley, 2017; Jenkins, 2024). Once more, a significant proportion of the issue here is that Bourdieu claimed that his work was not these things, without sufficiently proving otherwise. Bourdieu died in 2002 and I am unsure of his personal reading habits, but I think he may have benefitted from the feminist literature discussed in Section 6.1.2, where the dangers of claiming universal applicability from research is stressed (Haraway, 1988). Whether Bourdieu succeeded in overcoming these obstacles, simply took an interesting walk around them in a circular manner, or whether his theory can be 'tweaked' to ensure such success, is a conversation for another day (King, 2000; Heilbron and Steinmetz, 2018). I argue that such a route, even if circular, still allows for a researcher to obtain a 'view' that they may not otherwise have been achieved. This view might not say much about the existence of free will, but that was not my purpose in setting out on this walk.

The role and bias of the researcher when using Bourdieu's work is also noted, particularly because so much of his work discussed reflexivity (Maton, 2003). Once more, the primary issue here is that Bourdieu claimed his theory was exempt from a problem that continues to "stump" so many others (Jenkins, 2024: 108). I discuss reflexivity and my own positionality in Chapter 4 where, spoiler alert, I also do not find a way out of the labyrinth (but I also do

not claim to). What is important to address is that Bourdieu positioned the researcher as somehow more able than the researched to interrogate habitus. Regarding this specific critique, I align with Yang, who argues that "social agents are more knowledgeable about their surroundings than Bourdieu allows" (2014: 1529). I mention this because Bourdieu's perspective on this particular issue is misaligned with this thesis' overall aim of troubling knowledge flows. As I touched on earlier, my goal is not to dispute my privilege as a researcher, nor do I claim to 'upend' the rain stick of knowledge flow to a permanent 180º so that lay perspective becomes superior to 'expert' (this would be producing the same issues but the other way around). Consider it more of a 'shake up' or a momentary flattening of this trajectory, something I discuss further in Chapter 3. However, one can still use Bourdieu's theories without subscribing to his perspective on all particular matters – this issue becomes more salient if one is taking a particularly Bourdieusian inspired approach to reflexivity, which is not something I do within these pages (see Maton, 2003).

There are other critiques not discussed here: Bourdieu's success as the producer of a 'grand' theory and subsequent criticisms of grand theory (Walther, 2014: 21-23), his definition (or lack thereof) and understanding of class (Riley, 2017; McCarthy and Seim, 2023; Skeggs, 2004), his works applicability to gender (see McLeod, 2005 for an overview). These perspectives are an important conversation for a different time, and, as I have argued so far, they are not significant enough to render Bourdieu's work wholly unhelpful in this particular context, as the findings of the 'good farmer' literature which uses his framings outline. Indeed, how change occurs is something the 'good farmer' literature has begun to discuss (Sutherland and Darnhofer, 2012; Sutherland, 2013; Sutherland and Calo, 2020; Saunders, 2016; Cusworth, 2020) although it has yet to throw a hat into the ring on the free will question. As outlined in Section 8.1 and will be covered in Chapter 7, there are clear merits to the perspective gained when we take Bourdieu's suggested route, especially with the aim of 'spotting' the 'good farmer'. Even those who are most critical of Bourdieu have conceded that his work is "good to think with" (Jenkins, 2024: 31, 33, 36, 85, 117, 190 – this frequency says something!). It is used here as a tool for unpacking things which clearly has functional grip, rather than a blueprint around which the building of reality was, or should be, constructed.

8.2 Agri-Care Ethics

A second area of literature helpful for examining farm-level values and change, and that was developed through a grounded theory analysis of my data, is agri-care. This approach has been particularly successful within geography research because of its ability to include a multitude of actors within its scope and foreground the relationships between them. Whilst the 'good farmer' literature stays close to farmer culture, care within agrarian studies has allowed for the relationality within farming to be further understood.

Care ethics stems from feminist scholarship. In 1982, Carol Gilligan penned "In a Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Women's Development" where she critiqued a colleague's – Kohlberg – analysis of how morality develops in children (Kohlberg, 1981; Kohlberg and Kramer, 1969). She argued that the method used by Kohlberg defined morality in an individualistic framing, akin to a rights or justice approach, rather than a relational framing which centres connection to others. The former, Gilligan argued, was more favoured by boys and the latter more by girls, explaining Kohlberg's findings that boys developed morality to a higher level. Whilst not without critique (see Puka, 1990), this work is often cited as a core text regarding the development of care ethics within academic feminist thought. It inspired much discussion on the role of relationality within justice discussions, and the field of care ethics subsequently developed. Care ethics defines care as a blend of practice and values (Tronto, 2015), emotion and reason (Held, 2005). The most commonly referenced definition of care defines it as:

"as a species activity that includes everything that we do to maintain, continue, and repair our 'world' so that we can live in it as well as possible. That world includes our bodies, our selves, and our environment, all of which we seek to interweave in a complex, life-sustaining web" (Fisher and Tronto, 1990: 40)

The co-author cited here, Joan Tronto, has been a core scholar in the field of care ethics, writing on the inherent interdependence of individuals and that needing, giving, and receiving care are key, but often overlooked, facets of human life. Her work has delineated several phases of care (1993, 2013), with a core distinction being caring about and caring for. Caring about refers to the emotional and affected dynamics involved in care, and caring for classifies the embodied acts of care-giving (Milligan and Wiles, 2010: 741). Within the geography discipline, care ethics was first common within the medical context (Middleton and Samanani, 2020; Parr, 2003).

Whilst care implies positive connotations, literature is keen to stress that such a positive framing can obscure the complex reality of care, where multiple tensions can exist between subjects and violence can be enacted "in the name of" care (Cusworth, 2023: 59). The 'good life' for some often impinges on the 'good life' for others, for example (Krzywoszynska, 2019: 665). Care is not ahistorical, aspatial or separate from external power relations (Holloway et al., 2022; Lawson, 2007; McEwan and Goodman, 2010).

Care ethics within agrarian studies is particularly influenced by the work of Maria Puig de la Bellacasa (2010, 2015, 2017). Her work on permaculture drew on both Tronto (2015) and post-human scholarship (Latour, 2007; Haraway, 2016) and found a mutual care which exists between farmer and soil, although not always without tension and/or conflict (2017). Mincyte et al. (2025) have identified four overlapping approaches within agri-care literature, which form a helpful framework for reviewing the literature. They categorise these approaches as the following: (1) "The ethical contagion approach in more-than-human ethics" (Mincyte et al., 2025: 1350) which centres the non-human world (Pigott, 2021; Giraud, 2021; Seymour and Connelly, 2023; Alarcon and Marty, 2023); (2) approaches which focus on reciprocal responsibilities, rooted in practices of Indigenous, religious and/or spiritual care (TallBear, 2021; Barnett, 2023; Whyte and Cuomo, 2017); (3) Human-centred care which is "motivated by aesthetics, values and ethics" (Mincyte et al., 2025: 1350); (4) approaches to care which stem from political economy literature, with a focus on linking how both workers and non-human natures are exploited under capitalism (Calo and Corbett, 2024; Portocarrero Lacayo, 2024). Mincyte and colleagues also propose a fifth approach to care which centres gendered reproductive labor and analyses the interplays between "productive, domestic and public sphere in practicing caring agriculture" (2025: 1348).

This thesis attends particularly to this third category due to its focus on the human, farmer experience. However, texts rooted in the other categories remain relevant. Agri-care ethics is a useful framing for this thesis as it enables farmers' relationships (including with the non-human) and the ways they care 'about' and care 'for' these entities to be explored. John Law, in his study of agricultural veterinary practice, noted how care is expressed towards livestock, farmer, veterinarian and collectives of these actors – terming this "care multiple" (Law, 2010). Law writes that the multiplicities of care are "chronically problematic" (2010: 68) and often in tension, returning us to the earlier point that care is not inherently positive or romantic (Haraway, 2008: 93). This perspective therefore allows such tensions between givers and recipients of care to be explored, as other literature has successfully done. This is

seen, for example, within the work of Holloway et al. (2023) whose work on disease, livestock and 'killability' explored how some lives are sustained at the expense of others within a framework of care. Harbers (2010) has also explored, within the farm setting, how care and economy develop together, which outlines the utility of care ethics to this thesis which aims to pay attention to the impact of market forces on farmers.

Knowledge is a key facet of agri-care ethics, and a common theme within this literature review as a whole, like a robin following us around on this walk. Singleton examined Cattle Tracing Systems legislation and how this legislation meets with the "situated knowledges" (Haraway, 1988) produced on farms, with farmers often delineated by legislation as "in need of education about cattle care" despite their considerable experience (2012: 415). The role of experiential knowledge in care is stressed by Krzywoszynska's work, where she establishes this knowledge form as "both a pre-requisite for care, and as a result of care… good care can only be delivered by those practitioners who have a situated and experiential understanding of the world of actions" (2016: 291). Curry (2002) foregrounds how the relationality of care is often missed within governance framings, as the "attachment" inherent to farming is seen to constrain "rational judgement".

There are examples of when 'good farmer' literature and 'care ethics' literature overlap, indicating the development of a cohesive analytical trajectory across this thesis. Larder (2021) unpacks how the enactment of care towards the non-human forms part of the 'good farmer' framing for Australian farmers seeking to move towards more sustainable practice. Seymour and Connelly (2023) examine how care for the more-than-human, which is brought further into consideration within regenerative agriculture, may conflict with pre-existing 'good farmer' identities. Franklin et al. (2021) explore farmers experiences on Nutrient Vulnerable Zones legislation, finding that the way legislation attempts to redefine what is required of a 'good farmer' clashes with farmer perspectives on what is entailed of both the 'good farmer' and of 'good care'.

8.2.1 Critiques of (Agri) Care Ethics

Care ethics literature has also seen criticism, although much less substantial in comparison to Bourdieu's work. Many of these critiques concern where it sits in relation to other theories of justice. The question at hand within these discussions can be summarised as "Is the ethic of care meant to supplement or supplant traditional theories?" (Little, 1998a: 128). Whilst some of these critiques do interrogate the inherent logics of care ethics (Rudnick, 2001), none argue

that it is not useful or important, but rather focus on what domain(s) it should sit within (Meyers, 1998; Little, 1998b; Nelson, 1992; Tong, 1998). A lot of these critiques (occurring largely in the 1990s) have been addressed by further developments of care ethics, particularly during literature published in the 2010s (Tronto, 2013; Engster and Hamington, 2015). Whether or to what degree these criticisms have been successfully responded to is an evaluation I shall leave to those who originally penned the concerns. This thesis is not intended to address the placement of care ethics in justice scholarship, and the outcome of this debate, whilst important in its own right, is of only minor relevance to this work. As Koggel has written – "justice needs care and care needs justice" (1998: 188) – I shall leave the ironing out of further details of this relationship to others.

Largely in response to Gilligan's work, concern has been raised by feminist scholars as to whether the earlier developments of care ethics risk reproducing sexist tropes. With care originally located exclusively within the female domain, concerns that this valorises "the very sort of self-effacement that has stood in the way of women's advancement" (Little, 1998a: 128) were raised (see Diller, 1996 for an overview). Work has been done in response to these concerns (e.g. Puka, 1990) and the present-day development of care ethics makes a conscious effort to step away from essentialist understandings of care and gender. Concerns initially raised about how spaces and actions of care may be exploited have also been addressed, with much feminist literature dedicated to this topic, including how the exploitation of care also intersects with race, class, ability etc (Murphy, 2015; Raghuram, 2021; Hankivsky, 2014).

Agri-care specifically has not seen blanket-level critiques which argues against its overall utility (at least, not to my knowledge). Instead, texts have identified areas where further development of the theory would benefit: such as consideration of who benefits from, makes decisions about, and practically enacts care (Martin et al., 2015), how acts of care may limit alternative possibilities (Giraud, 2019), and the implication of violence within multispecies entanglements (Ginn, 2014; Giraud, 2021; van Dooren, 2011). A pre-existing 'problem' within care ethics is that of distance, where care risks being limited to those to which we are familiar (Bartos, 2019; Popke, 2006). This has been explored further within an agricultural context by George Cusworth (2023). Cusworth argues that conceptual developments are needed so that the remote actors implicated and impacted by on-farm decisions are included within the scope of agri-care studies. Further scholarship that begins to address this is apparent (Vogel, 2025; Herman and O'Neill, 2025). What is important for this thesis is that these critiques are largely about ways to develop and improve agri-care and to ensure certain

actors are not missed within scholarship as a whole, rather than against the overall utility of care ethics within agrarian studies.

As I have noted in Section 6, this thesis does not take a more-than-human perspective. Some agri-care literature makes explicit criticisms of this, arguing that human-centric research excludes the reality, experience and agency of others (Puig de la Bellacasa, 2017: 194). Greater inclusion of the more-than-human within research is an important and wholly welcome 'turn' within recent scholarship (Whatmore, 2006). However, as we discussed in our brief foray into the politics of knowledge, *all* research contains "views from somewhere" and is thus partial in its scope (Haraway, 1988: 590). Agri-care as an area of literature was chosen because of the centrality of care as a theme within interviews and as it allowed for farmers' relationships with the non-human (not the same as centring the non-human!) to be better included within analysis. For all the merits of the grounded theory approach, this is one of its limitations – research design cannot both uncover theory from the 'bottom up' *and* be designed with said theories in mind.

Pub?

9. Conclusion

That walk was nowhere near as long as it felt when I first did it, although previously I did keep getting slightly lost and the more existential moments on Reflexivity Hill are much quicker to explain than they are to initially go through. Plus, everything feels easier with company. I fear that my shoes still have remnants of the 1970s dairy-themed floods we encountered back in Section 2, but Conclusion Pub is a very understanding establishment.

This literature review contains central themes regarding the dangers of overlooking lived experience and undercounting experiential knowledge. Like a bird that followed us around, this was present across the areas we covered: in the critiques of post-productivism which note the omission of "actor orientated and behaviourally grounded" perspectives (Wilson, 2001); the the ways which governance often holds more limited understandings of farmer motivations (Brown et al., 2021; Curry, 2002); in the ways 'bottom up' knowledge does not inform private standard and assurance scheme content (Konefal et al., 2005). Literature that does aim to centre grounded perspectives has been able to garner important insights, such as insights into the relationships farmers have with agri-environmental schemes (Burton et al., 2008; Riley, 2016a; Cusworth and Dodsworth, 2021) and the value of experiential knowledge for the enactment of 'good care' (Krzywoszynska, 2016). As I have touched on, I have

allowed the perspectives of interviewees and the scholarly literature on more relational, care-full approaches to research, to shape this work. The implications of this on a methodological level shall now be explored.

References

Adame, A. (2013) "There Needs to be a Place in Society for Madness": The Psychiatric Survivor Movement and New Directions in Mental Health Care, *Journal of Humanistic Psychology* (54:4)

AHDB (Agriculture and Horticulture Development Board) (2022) High prices but high fertiliser cost, 11 March 2022. https://ahdb.org.uk/news/high-prices-but-high-fertiliser-cost-grain-market-daily Accessed 8/12/25

Alarcon, M., Marty, P. (2023) Observing farm plots to increase attentiveness and cooperation with nature: A case study in Belgium, *Agriculture and Human Values* (41)

Almås, R., Campbell, H. (2012) Introduction: Emerging Challenges, New Policy Frameworks and the Resilience of Agriculture, in, Almås, R., Campbell, H. (eds.) *Rethinking Agricultural Policy Regimes: Food Security, Climate Change, and the Future of Resilience of Global Agriculture* (Emerald Publishing Limited)

Attorp, A., Hubbard, C. (2023) Governing the UK agri-food system post-Brexit. in, Attorp, A., Heron, S., McAreavey, R. (eds.) *Rural Governance in the UK: Towards a Sustainable and Equitable Society* (Routledge)

Baker, J. (2024) Environmental land management in 2024: details of actions and payments, *DEFRA Blog*, https://defrafarming.blog.gov.uk/2024/01/04/environmental-land-management-in-2024-details-of-actions-and-payments/ Accessed 12/8/24

Baldock, D., Lowe, P. (1996) The Development of European Agri-environment Policy, in, Whitby, M. (ed.) *The European Environment and CAP Reform* (CABI)

Barlow, H., Lostak, M. (2023) Retailer and grower relationships and the supply chain pressures in English horticulture: The lived experience, *Journal of Rural Studies* (102:11)

Barnett, J. (2023) Imagining more-than-human Care: from multispecies Mothering to Caring relations in finding the Mother Tree, *Journal of Ecohumanism* (2)

Bartos, A. (2019) Introduction: Stretching the Boundaries of Care, *Gender, Place and Culture* (26:6)

Beacham, J D., Jackson, P., Jaworski, C C., Krzywoszynska, A., Dicks, L V. (2023) Contextualising farmer perspectives on regenerative agriculture: A post-productivist future? *Journal of Rural Studies* (102)

Beasley-Murray, J. (2000) Value and Capital in Bourdieu and Marx, in, Brown, N., Szeman, I. (eds.) *Pierre Bourdieu: Fieldwork in Culture* (Rowman and Littlefield)

Bingen, J., Siyengo, A. (2002) Standards and corporate reconstruction in the Michigan dry bean industry, *Agriculture and Human Values* (19:4)

Boisson, J-M, Buller, H. (1996) France, in, Whitby, M. (ed.) *The European Environment and CAP Reform: Policies and Prospects for Conservation* (CABI)

Bourdieu, P. (1977) *Outline of a Theory of Practice* (Chicago University Press)

Bourdieu, P. (1983) The field of cultural production, or: The economic world reversed, *Poetics* (12:4-5)

Bourdieu, P. (1984) *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste* (Harvard University Press)

Bourdieu, P. (1986) The forms of capital, in, Richardson, J. (ed.) *Handbook of Theory and Research for the Sociology of Education* (Greenwood Press)

Bourdieu, P. (1989) Social Space and Symbolic Power, *Sociological Theory* (7:1)

Bourdieu, P. (1990) *The Logic of Practice* (Polity Press)

Bourdieu, P. (1998) *Practical Reason: On the Theory of Action* (Stanford University Press)

Bourdieu, P., Passerson, J C. (1977) *Reproduction in Education, Society and Culture* (SAGE)

Bourdieu, P., Wacquant, L. (1992) *An Invitation to Reflexive Sociology* (University of Chicago Press)

Bowers, J K. Cheshire, P C. (1983) *Agriculture, the Countryside and Land Use* (Methuen)

Brassley, P., Soffe, R. (2016) *Agriculture: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford University Press)

Brigg, M. (2016) Engaging Indigenous knowledges: From sovereign to relational knowers, *Australian Journal of Indigenous Education* (45)

Brown, C., Kovács, E., Herzon, I., Villamayor-Tomas, S., Albizua, A., Galanaki, A., Grammatikopoulou, I., McCracken, D., Alkan Olsson, J., Zinnegrebe, Y. (2011) Simplistic understandings of farmer motivations could undermine the environmental potential of the common agricultural policy, *Land Use Policy* (101)

Bruner, J. (2009) *Actual Minds, Possible Worlds* (Harvard University Press)

Buckwell, A E., Harvey, D R., Thomson, K J., Parton, K. (1982) *The Costs and Benefits of the Common Agricultural Policy* (Croom Helm)

Buller, H., Wilson, G A., Holl, A. (2000) *Agri-environmental Policy in the European Union* (Routledge)

Burch, D., Dixon, J., Lawrence, G. (2012) Introduction to symposium on the changing role of supermarkets in global supply chains: from seedling to supermarket: agri-food supply chains in transition, *Agriculture and Human Values* (30)

Burch, D., Lawrence, G. (2007) *Supermarkets and Agri-Food Supply Chains: Transformations in the production and consumption of foods* (Edward Elgar)

Burton, R J F. (2004a) Seeing through the 'good farmer's' eyes: towards developing an understanding of the social symbolic value of 'productivist' behaviour, *Sociologia Ruralis* (44)

Burton, R J F. (2004b) Reconceptualising the 'behavioural approach' in agriculture studies: a socio-psychological perspective, *Journal of Rural Studies* (20:3)

Burton, R J F., Forney, J., Stock, P., Sutherland, L-A. (2021) *The Good Farmer: Culture and Identity in Food and Agriculture* (Routledge, Earthscan)

Burton, R J F., Kuczera, C., Schwarz, G. (2008) Exploring farmers' cultural resistance to voluntary agri-environmental schemes, *Sociologia Ruralis* (48)

Burton, R J F., Paragahawewa, U H. (2011) Creating culturally sustainable agri-environmental schemes, *Journal of Rural Studies* (27)

Burton, R J F., Wilson, G A. (2006) Injecting social psychology theory into conceptualisations of agricultural agency: Towards a post-productivist farmer self-identity? *Journal of Rural Studies* (22:1)

Busch, L. (2000) The moral economy of grades and standards, *Journal of Rural Studies* (16:3)

Busch, L. (2011) The private governance of food: equitable exchange or bizarre bazaar? *Agriculture and Human Values* (28)

Busch, L., Bain, C. (2004) New! Improved? The Transformation of the Global Agrifood System, *Rural Sociology* (69:3)

Calo, A., Corbett, R. (2024) New entrant farming policy as predatory inclusion: (Re)production of the farm through generational renewal policy programs in Scotland, *Agriculture and Human Values* (41)

Campbell, H. (2009) Breaking new grounds in food regimes theory: corporate environmentalism, ecological feedbacks and the 'food from somewhere' regime, *Agriculture and Human Values* (26:4)

Campbell, H. (2013) Food and the audit society, in, Murcott, A., Belasco, W., Jackson, P. (eds.) *The Handbook of Food Research* (Bloomsbury Publishing)

Campbell, H., Rosin, C., Hunt, L., Fairweather, J. (2012) The social practice of sustainable agriculture under audit discipline: Initial insights from the ARGOS project in New Zealand, *Journal of Rural Studies* (28:1)

Campbell, N D. (2016) Nowhere Man, *Science as Culture* (25:2)

Cardwell, E. (2023) Moral Economies of Life and Death: Agricultural Improvement, Imperialism, and Chemical Kinships with Reactive Nitrogen, *Catalyst* (9:1)

Case, P. (2025) Spending Review: Defra funding higher than expected, *Farmers Weekly*, https://www.fwi.co.uk/news/farm-policy/spending-review-defra-funding-higher-than-expected Accessed 20/3/26

Castree, N. (2003) Environmental issues: relational ontologies and hybrid politics, *Progress in Human Geography* (27:2)

Christophers, B. (2018) *The New Enclosure: The Appropriation of Public Land in Neoliberal Britain* (Verso Books)

Clapp, J. (2021) The problem with growing corporate concentration and power in the global food system, *Nature Food* (2)

Cleary, R., Armour, C. (2022) Exploring the role of practitioner lived experience of mental health issues in counselling and psychotherapy, *Counselling and Psychotherapy Research* (22:4)

Cloke, P. (1997) Country backwater to virtual village? Rural studies and 'the cultural turn', *Journal of Rural Studies* (13:4)

Coe, S., Uberoi, E. (2023) Farm funding: Implementing new approaches, *House of Commons Library*, https://researchbriefings.files.parliament.uk/documents/CBP-9431/CBP-9431.pdf Accessed 13/3/26

Coulson, H., Milbourne, P. (2022) Agriculture, food and land: Struggles for UK post-Brexit agri-food justice, *Geoforum* (131)

Country, B., Wright, S., Suchet-Pearson, S. Lloyd, K., Burarrwanga, L., Ganambarr, R., Ganamberr-Stubbs, M., Ganambarr, B., Maymuru, D., Sweeney, J. (2016) Co-becoming Bawaka: Towards a relational understanding of place/space, *Progress in Human Geography* (40:4)

Crenshaw, K. (1989) Demarginalizing the intersection of race and sex, in, Maschke, K. (ed.) *Feminist Legal Theories* (Routledge)

Crepaz, M., Worthy, B. (2024) Cleaning up UK Politics: What would better lobbying regulation look like? *Parliamentary Affairs* (*77*:3)

Curry, J M. (2002) Care Theory and 'caring' systems of Agriculture, *Agriculture and Human Values* (19)

Cusworth G., Dodsworth, J. (2021) Using the 'good farmer' concept to explore agricultural attitudes to the provision of public goods. A case study of participants in an English agri-environmental scheme, *Agriculture and Human Values* (38)

Cusworth, G. (2019) *Exploring the long-term social and land management impacts on participants of the Entry Level Stewardship Scheme*, PhD Thesis, The University of Gloucestershire

Cusworth, G. (2020) Falling short of being the 'good farmer': losses of social and cultural capital incurred through environmental mismanagement, and the long-term impacts agri-environment scheme participation, *Journal of Rural Studies* (75)

Cusworth, G. (2023) Metabolic agricultural ethics: Violence and care beyond the gate, *Progress in Environmental Geography* (2:1-2)

Danielle, A. (2025) UK Grocery Market Share 2025, *Grocery Trade News*, https://www.grocerytradenews.com/uk-grocery-market-share-2025/ Accessed 8/12/25

Darnhofer, I. (2020) Farming from a Process-Relational Perspective: Making Openings for Change Visible, *Sociologia Ruralis* (60:2)

Darnhofer, I., Lamine, C., Strauss, A., Naverrete, M. (2016) The resilience of family farms: Towards a relational approach, *Journal of Rural Studies* (44)

DEFRA (Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs) (2020a) 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/954283/agricultural-transition-plan.pdf Accessed 20/12/25

DEFRA (2020b) New details of the flagship Environmental Land Management scheme unveiled by Environment Secretary, https://deframedia.blog.gov.uk/2020/02/25/new-details-of-the-flagship-environmental-land-management-scheme-unveiled-by-environment-secretary/ Accessed 12/8/25

DEFRA (2021) Environmental Land Management and the agricultural transition, *House of Commons*, https://committees.parliament.uk/publications/7663/documents/79987/default/ Accessed 1/3/26

DEFRA (2023a) Environmental Land Management (ELM) update: how government will pay for land-based environment and climate goods and services, https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/environmental-land-management-update-how-government-will-pay-for-land-based-environment-and-climate-goods-

and-services/environmental-land-management-elm-update-how-government-will-pay-for-land-based-environment-and-climate-goods-and-services Accessed 12/8/25

DEFRA (2023b) Nature markets: A framework for scaling up private investment in nature recovery and sustainable farming, https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/642542ae60a35e000c0cb148/nature-markets.pdf Accessed 12/8/25

DEFRA (2024a) Inaccurate coverage of DEFRA's budget, *Defra in the media blog*, https://deframedia.blog.gov.uk/2024/11/01/inaccurate-coverage-on-defras-budget/#:~:text=Defra%20Press%20Office%2C%201%20November,resilient%20and%20sustainable%20farming%20sector. Accessed 20/3/26

DEFRA (2024b) Agricultural Transition Plan update January 2024, https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/agricultural-transition-plan-2021-to-2024/agricultural-transition-plan-update-january-2024 Accessed 1/3/26

DEFRA (2024c) Advancing work on supply chain fairness, *DEFRA Farming Blog*, https://defrafarming.blog.gov.uk/2024/11/21/advancing-work-on-supply-chain-fairness/ Accessed 25/10/25

DEFRA (2025a) Spending Review 2025: a commitment to farming, *The Farming Blog*, https://defrafarming.blog.gov.uk/2025/06/16/spending-review-2025-a-commitment-to-farming/ Accessed 20/3/26

DEFRA (2025b) Farm Business Income by type of farm in England 2023/24, https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/farm-business-income/farm-business-income-by-type-of-farm-in-england-202324#farm-business-income-by-cost-centre Accessed 24/07/25

Delamont, S. (2009) The only honest thing: Autoethnography, reflexivity and small crises in fieldwork, *Ethnography and Education* (4:1)

Dewally, K., Bark, R H., Harwood, A R., Lovett, A A. (2025) Learning from the past and embracing future opportunities: Perceptions of new Environmental Land Management Schemes and private nature markets, *Journal of Rural Studies* (119)

Diller, A. (1996) The Ethics of Care and Education: A New Paradigm, Its Critics, and Its Educational Significance, in, Diller, A. (ed.) *The Gender Question in Education: Theory, Pedagogy, and Politics* (Taylor and Francis)

Dobson, P.W. (2004) Exploiting buyer power: lessons from the British grocery trade. *Antitrust LJ* (*72*)

Elliot, K. (2007) Agriculture and the Doha Round, *Center for Global Development*, https://www.cgdev.org/publication/agriculture-and-doha-round Accessed 1/3/26

Engster, D., Hamington, M. (2015) *Care Ethics and Political Theory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press)

Evans, N., Morris, C., Winter, M. (2002) Conceptualizing agriculture: a critique of post-productivism as the new orthodoxy, *Progress in Human Geography* (26:3)

Fairweather, J R., Keating, N C. (1994) Goals and management of New Zealand farmers, *Agricultural Systems* (44:2)

Feindt, P H. (2018) EU Agricultural Policy, in, Heinelt, H., Münch, S. (eds.) *Handbook of European Policies* (Edward Elgar)

Fisher, B., Tronto, J. (1990) Towards a Feminist Theory of Care, in, Abel, E., Nelson, M. (eds.) *Circles of Care* (State University of New York Press)

Fixico, D. (2013) *The American Indian mind in a linear world: American Indian studies and traditional knowledge* (Routledge)

Foley, D. (2018) Indigenous Methodology: Is it invented or is it legitimate? *Journal of Australian Indigenous Issues* (21)

Food Foundation, The (2025) *Corporate lobbying: the dark side of the plate*, https://foodfoundation.org.uk/publication/corporate-lobbying-dark-side-plate Accessed 8/12/25

Franklin, A., Udall, D., Schmutz, U., Rayns, F. (2021) 'Hell or high water': Good farming and environmental care as contested practices in the implementation of nitrate vulnerable zones in Wales, *Journal of Rural Studies* (83)

Franks, J R. (2022) UK Agriculture at a crossroads, *Outlook on Agriculture* (51:4)

Frank, L., Feola, G., Schape, N. (2024) Assessing regime destabilisation through policy change: An analysis of agricultural policy in the United Kingdom during Brexit, *Environmental Innovation and Societal Transitions* (50)

Friedberg, S. (2007) Supermarkets and imperial knowledge, *Cultural Geographies* (14:3)

Friedmann, H. (2005) From colonialism to green capitalism: social movements and emergence of food regimes, in, Buttel, F H., McMichael, P (eds.) *New Directions in the Sociology of Global Development* (Elsevier)

Friedmann, H., McMichael, P. (1989) Agriculture and the state system, *Sociologia Ruralis* (29:2)

FSA (Food Standards Agency) (2022) *Our Food 2021: An annual review of food standards across the UK*, https://www.food.gov.uk/our-work/annualreviewoffoodstandards2021 Accessed 8/12/25

Fuchs, D., Kalfagianni, A. (2010) The Democratic Legitimacy of Private Authority in the Food Chain, in, Porter, T., Ronit, K. (eds.) *The Challenges of Global Business Authority: Democratic Renewal, Stalemate, or Decay?* (Suny Press)

Fuchs, D., Kalfagianni, A., Arentsen, M. (2009) Retail Power, Private Standards, and Sustainability in the Global Food System, in, Clapp, J., Fuchs, D. (eds.) *Corporate Power in Global Agrifood Governance* (MIT Press)

Garforth, C., Rehman, T. (2006) Research to understand and model the behaviour and motivations of farmers in responding to policy changes (England), Report to DEFRA, https://www.cabidigitallibrary.org/doi/full/10.5555/20123259134 Accessed 6/8/24

Garner, I., McFeeters, D., Guy, A., Hopley, R., Galbraith, N. (2025) Understanding farmer mental health and wellbeing in a volatile, isolating and misunderstood industry, *Journal of Rural Studies* (118)

Gasson, R. (1973) Goals and Values of Farmers, *Journal of Agricultural Economics* (24:3)

GCA (Groceries Code Adjudicator) (2024) Annual Report and Accounts: Improving fairness for suppliers, https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/66a8feeaab418ab055592fe3/GCA_Annual_Report_and_Accounts_2023-24__web_.pdf Accessed 25/10/25

Gilbert, M R. (1994) The politics of location: doing feminist research ‘at home’, *Professional Geographer* (46)

Gilligan, C. (1982) *In a Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Women’s Development* (Harvard University Press)

Ginn, F. (2014) Sticky Lives: Slugs, Detachment and More-Than-Human Ethics in the Garden, *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* (39)

Giraud, E H. (2019) *What Comes After Entanglement?* (Duke University Press)

Giraud, E H. (2021) Urban Food Autonomy: The Flourishing of an Ethics of Care for Sustainability, *Humanities* (10:1)

Glaser, B G., Strauss, A L. (1967) *The Discovery of Grounded Theory* (Aldine)

Glover, J L. (2010) Capital Usage in Adverse Situations: Applying Bourdieu’s Theory of Capital to Family Farm Businesses, *Journal of Family and Economic Issues* (31)

Gravey, V. (2022) Brexit and the Common Agricultural Policy: There and Back Again, in, Antonopoulos, I., Bell, M., Čavošk, A., Petetin, L. (eds.) *The Governance of Agriculture in Post-Brexit UK* (Routledge)

Gould, R K., Martinez, D E., Hoelting, K R. (2023) Exploring Indigenous relationality to inform the relational turn in sustainability science, *Ecosystems and People* (19:1)

Greer, A. (2017) Post-exceptional politics in agriculture: an examination of the 2013 CAP reform, *Journal of Public Policy* (24:11)

Greer, A., Grant, W. (2023) Divergence and continuity after Brexit in agriculture, *Journal of European Public Policy* (30:11)

Haggerty, J., Campbell, H., Morris, C. (2009) Keeping the stress off the sheep? Agricultural intensification, neoliberalism, and ‘good’ farming in New Zealand, *Geoforum* (40)

Halfacree, K. (1997) Contrasting roles for the post-productivist countryside, in, Cloke, P,. Little, J. (eds.) *Contested Countryside Cultures* (Routledge)

Halfacree, K. (1999) A new space or spatial effacement? Alternative futures for the post-productivist countryside, in, Walford, N., Everitt, J C., Napton, D E. (eds.) *Reshaping the Countryside: Perceptions of Processes of Rural Change* (CABI)

Hamington, M. (2015) Politics is not a game: The radical potential of care, in, Engster, D., Hamington, M. (eds.) *Care Ethics and Political Theory* (Oxford University Press)

Hamlett, J., Alexander, A., Bailey, A.R., Shaw, G. (2008) Regulating UK supermarkets: an oral-history perspective, *History and Policy*, https://historyandpolicy.org/policy-papers/papers/regulating-uk-supermarkets-an-oral-history-perspective/ Accessed 8/12/25

Hampton, E. (1995) Memory comes before knowledge: Research may improve if researchers remember their motives, *Canadian Journal of Native Education* (21)

Hankivsky, O. (2014) Rethinking Care Ethics: On the promise and potential of an intersectional analysis, *American Political Science Review* (108:2)

Haraway, D. (1988) Situated Knowledges: The science question in feminism and the privilege of partial perspective, *Feminist Studies* (14:3)

Haraway, D. (2008) *When species meet* (University of Minnesota Press)

Haraway, D. (2016) A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology, and Socialist-Feminism in the late twentieth century, in, Haraway, D., Wolfe, C. (eds.) *Manifestly Haraway* (University of Minnesota Press)

Harbers, J A. (2010) Animal farm love stories: About care and economy, in, Mol, A., Moser, I., Pols, J. (eds.) *Care in practice: On tinkering in clinics, homes and farms* (Transcript)

Harding, S. (1991) *Whose Science? Whose Knowledge? Thinking from Women's Lives* (Cornell University Press)

Harding, S. (2015) *Objectivity and Diversity: Another Logic of Scientific Research* (University of Chicago Press)

Harrison, C M., Burgess, J., Clark, J. (1998) Discounted knowledges: Farmers' and residents' understandings of nature conservation goals and policies, *Journal of Environmental Management* (54:4)

Hart, K., Wilson, G A. (1998) UK Implementation of Agri-environment Regulation 2078/92/EEC: enthusiastic supporter or reluctant participant? *Landscape Research* (23:3)

Harvey, D R., Thomson, K J. (1985) Costs, Benefits and the Future of the Common Agricultural Policy, *Journal of Common Market Studies* (24:1)

Harvey, D. (2007) *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* (Oxford University Press)

Harvey, D., Riley, M. (2005) Country stories: the use of oral histories of the countryside to challenge the sciences of the past and future, *Interdisciplinary Science Reviews* (30:1)

Hasnain, S., Ingram, J., Zurek, M. (2020) *Mapping the UK Food System – A report for the UKRI Transforming UK Food Systems Programme*, University of Oxford: Environmental Change Institute, https://www.eci.ox.ac.uk/sites/default/files/2022-05/Mapping-the-UK-food-system-digital.pdf Accessed 25/10/25

Hathaway, D. (1997) *Agriculture and the GATT: Rewriting the rules* (Institute for International Economics)

Heilbron, J., Steinmetz, G. (2018) A Defence of Bourdieu, *Catalyst* (2:1)

Held, M B E. (2023) Decolonizing Science: Undoing the Colonial and Racist Hegemony of Western Science, *Journal of Multidisciplinary Evaluation* (19:44)

Held, V. (2005) *The Ethics of Care: Personal, Political, and Global* (Oxford University Press)

Helm, D. (2017) Agriculture after Brexit, *Oxford Review of Economic Policy* (33:1)

Herman, A., O'Neill, K. (2025) The geographies of veganism: Exploring the complex entanglements of places, peoples, and profits through vegan food practices, *Progress in Environmental Geography* (4:1)

Heron, K., Heffron, A., Booth, R. (2023) You can't eat profits: A democratic vision for England's tormented farmlands, *The New Statesman*, https://www.newstatesman.com/ideas/2023/04/eat-profits-england-food-system-focused-over-sustainability-new-scheme Accessed 8/8/25

Hill, B., Bradley, D. (2024) Goals and values of farmers revisited: Gasson fifty years on, *Journal of Agricultural Economics* (75:1)

Hingley, M K. (2005) Power Imbalance in UK Agri-Food Supply Channels: Learning to Live with the Supermarkets? *Journal of Marketing Management* (21:1-2)

Hodge, I. (2000) Agri-environmental relationships and the choice of policy mechanism, *The World Economy* (23:2)

Hölling I. (2001) About the impossibility of a single (ex-)user and survivor of psychiatry position, *Acta Psychiatrica Scandinavica* (104)

Holloway, L. (2005) Aesthetics, genetics, and evaluating animal bodies: Locating and displacing cattle on show and in figures, *Environment and Planning D* (23)

Holloway, L., Mahon, N., Clark, B., Proctor, A. (2023) Living with cows, sheep and endemic disease in the North of England: Embodied care, biosocial collectivities and killability, *Environment and Planning E* (6:2)

Holmes, J. (2008) Impulses towards a multifunctional transition in rural Australia: Interpreting regional dynamics in landscapes, lifestyles and livelihoods, *Landscape Research* (33)

Holmes, J. (2010a) Divergent regional trajectories in Australia's tropical savannas: Indicators of a multifunctional rural transition, *Geographical Research* (48)

Holmes, J. (2010b) The multifunctional transition in Australia's tropical savannas: The emergence of consumption, protection, and indigenous values, *Geographical Research* (48)

Holmes, J. (2012) Cape York Peninsula, Australia: A frontier region undergoing a multifunctional transition with indigenous engagement, *Journal of Rural Studies* (28)

Holt Giménez, E. (2017) *A Foodie's Guide to Capitalism* (Monthly Review Press)

Horton, H., Stacey, K. (2025) Labour cutting farming budget in England by £100m a year, figures shows, *The Guardian*, https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2025/jun/16/labour-cutting-farming-budget-in-england-by-100m-a-year-spending-review Accessed 20/3/26

Hubbard, C., Davis, J., Feng, S., Harvey, D., Liddon, A., Moxey, A., Ojo, M., Patton, M., Philippidis, G., Scott, S., Shreshtha, S., Wallace, M., (2018) Brexit: how will UK agriculture fare? *Eurochoices* (17:2)

Hughes, J. (2023) Environmental land management schemes: details of actions and payments, *DEFRA Farming Blog*, https://defrafarming.blog.gov.uk/2023/01/26/environmental-land-management-schemes-details-of-actions-and-payments/ Accessed 13/3/26

Hunt, L. (2010) Interpreting orchardists' talk about their orchards: the good orchardists, *Agriculture and Human Values* (27)

Hurst, B., Macguire, R., Johnson, H. (2024) Submission to Independent Review of the Food and Grocery Code of Conduct 2023-24, *Centre for Decent Work and Industry*, https://treasury.gov.au/sites/default/files/2024-06/c2024-489934-qut-centre-for-decent-work-and-industry.pdf Accessed 12/12/25

Huttunen, S., Peltomaa, J. (2016) Agri-environmental policies and 'good farming' in cultivation practices at Finnish farms, *Journal of Rural Studies* (44)

Ilbery, B., Bowler, I. (1998) From agricultural productivism to post-productivism, in, Ilbery, B. (eds.) *The Geography of Rural Change* (Routledge)

Jack, L., Hammans, H. (2022) Unpicking Food Prices: Where does your food pound go, and why do farmers get so little? *Sustain* https://www.sustainweb.org/news/nov22-unpicking-food-prices-new/ Accessed 5/12/24

Jakobsen, M. (2017) Consequence of intensive use of non-financial performance measures in Danish family farm holdings, *Qualitative Research in Accounting and Management* (14:2)

Jenkins, R. (2024) *Pierre Bourdieu* (Taylor and Francis)

Jones, E., Hill, L D. (1994) Re-engineering marketing policies in food and agriculture: Issues and alternatives for grain grading policies, in, Padberg, D I. (ed.) *Re-Engineering Market Policies for Food and Agriculture* (Food and Agricultural Marketing Consortium)

Kam, H., Smith, H., Potter, C. (2023) Public money for public goods: the role of ideas in driving agriculture policy in the EU and post-Brexit UK, *Land Use Policy* (129)

King, A. (2000) Thinking with Bourdieu Against Bourdieu: A 'Practical' Critique of Habitus, *Sociological Theory* (18:3)

Koggel, C M. (1998) *Perspective on Equality: Constructing a Relational Theory* (Rowman and Littlefield)

Kohlberg, L. (1981) *The Philosophy of Moral Development* (Harper and Row)

Kohlberg, L., Kramer, R. (1969) Continuities and Discontinuities in Child and Adult Moral Development, *Human Development* (12)

Kolk, A., van Tulder, R. (2004) Setting new global rules? TNCs and codes of conduct, *Transnational Corporations* (14:3)

Konefal, J., Mascarenhas, M., Hatanaka, M. (2005) Governance in the global agro-food system: Backlighting the role of transnational supermarket chains, *Agriculture and Human Values* (22)

Kristensen, E., Jakobsen, E B. (2011) Challenging the myth of the irrational dairy farmer; understanding decision-making related to herd health, *New Zealand Veterinary Journal* (59:1)

Krzywoszynska, A. (2016) What farmers know: Experiential knowledge and care in vine growing, *Sociologia Ruralis* (56:2)

Krzywoszynska, A. (2019) Caring for soil life in the Anthropocene: The role of attentiveness in more-than-human ethics, *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* (44:4)

Landzettel, M. (2021) Things will only get worse: Post-Brexit reality is hitting farmers hard, *Agricultural and Rural Convention*, https://www.arc2020.eu/things-will-only-get-worse-post-brexit-reality-is-hitting-farmers-hard/ Accessed 1/3/26

Larder, N. (2021) Good farming as surviving well in rural Australia, *Journal of Rural Studies* (88)

Latour, B. (1999) *Pandora's Hope: Essays on the Reality of Science Studies* (Harvard University Press)

Latour, B. (2007) *Reassembling the Social: an introduction to actor-network-theory* (Oxford University Press)

Latulippe, N. (2015) Bridging parallel rows: epistemic difference and relational accountability in cross-cultural research, *International Indigenous Policy Journal* (6)

Law, J. (2010) Care and killing: Tensions in veterinary practice, in, Mol, A., Moser, I., Pols, J. (eds.) *Care in practice: On tinkering in clinics, homes and farms* (Transcript)

Lawson, V. (2007) Geographies of care and responsibility, *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* (97:1)

Lawson, V. (2009) Instead of Radical Geography, How About Caring Geography? *Antipode* (41:1)

Lever, A., Fuseini, A., Gittins, P. (2025) The sacrificial lambs of Brexit: sheep farmers, food security and climate change, in, Espeter, L M., Hering, L. (eds.) *Commodity Chains Under Pressure: Resilience through Coping, Adaption and Transformation* (Edward Elgar)

Little, M O. (1998a) Introduction, *Journal of Medicine and Philosophy* (23:2)

Little, M O. (1998b) Care: From Theory to Orientation and Back, *The Journal of Medicine and Philosophy* (23:2)

Little, R., Lyon, J., Tsouvalis, J. (2022) The co-design of post-Brexit and agri-environmental policy – focusing on environmental land management in England, in, Attorp, A., Heron, S., McAreavey, R. (eds.) *Rural Governance in the UK: Towards a Sustainable and Equitable Society* (Routledge)

Lobley, M., Potter, C. (1998) Environmental stewardship in UK agriculture: a comparison of the Environmentally Sensitive Area Programme and the Countryside Stewardship Scheme in south east England, *Geoforum* (29:4)

Long, W H. (1963) The Development of Mechanization in English Farming, *The Agricultural History Review* (11:1) p15-26

Louloudis, L., Beopoulos, N., Vlahos, G. (2000) Greece: late implementation of agri-environmental policies, in, Buller, H., Wilson, G A., Höll, A. (eds.) *Agri-environmental Policy in the European Union* (Routledge)

Lowe, P., Cox, G., MacEwen, M., O'Riordan, T., Winter, P. (1986) *Countryside Conflicts: the politics of farming, forestry and conservation* (Gower)

Lowe, P., Murdoch, J., Marsden, T., Munton, R., Flynn, A. (1993) Regulating the New Rural Spaces: the Uneven Development of Land, *Journal of Rural Studies* (9:3)

Malik, X. (2025) Debate on the Groceries Code Adjudicator. *House of Commons Library Research Briefing*, https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/research-briefings/cdp-2025-0114/ Accessed 8/12/25

Marsden, J., Lowe, P., Munton, R., Flynn, A. (1993) *Constructing the Countryside* (UCL Press)

Marsden, T. (1998) Economic Perspectives, in, Ilbery, B. (ed.) *The Geography of Rural Change* (Longman)

Martin, A., Myers, N., Viseu, A. (2015) The Politics of Care in Technoscience, *Social Studies of Science* (45:5)

Martinez, D E. (2014) Storying traditions, lessons and lives: responsible and grounded Indigenous storying ethics and methods, *Genealogy* (5:4)

Maton, K. (2003) Reflexivity, Relationism and Research: Pierre Bourdieu and the Epistemic Conditions of Social Scientific Knowledge, *Space and Culture* (6:1)

Maton, K. (2008) Habitus, in, Grenfell, M. (ed.) *Pierre Bourdieu: Key Concepts* (Taylor and Francis)

Mayozer, M., Roudart, L. (2006) *History of World Agriculture: From the Neolithic Age to the Current Crisis* (Earthscan)

McCarthy, M A., Seim, J. (2023) Classes Without Labor: Three Critiques of Bourdieu, *Social and Cultural Sciences Faculty Research and Publications* (359)

McLeod, J. (2005) Feminists re-reading Bourdieu: Old debates and new questions about gender habitus and gender change, *Theory and Research in Education* (3:1)

McEwan, C., Goodman, M K. (2010) Place geography and the ethics of care: Introductory remarks on the geographies of ethics, responsibility and care, *Ethics, Place and Environment* (13:2)

McGuire, J M., Morton, L W., Arbuckle, J G., Cast, A D. (2015) Farmer identities and responses to the social-biophysical environment, *Journal of Rural Studies* (39)

McLafferty, S. (1995) Counting for women, *Professional Geographer* (47)

Meyers, P A. (1998) The “Ethic of Care” and the Problem of Power, *Journal of Political Philosophy* (6)

Middleton, J., Samanani, F. (2020) Accounting for care within human geography, *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* (46)

Milligan, C., Wiles, J. (2010) Landscapes of Care, *Progress in Human Geography* (34: 6)

Milward, A.S. (1984) *The reconstruction of Western Europe, 1945–51* (University of California Press)

Mincyte, D., Bartkiene, A., Bikauskaite, R., Šakelaitė, I., Otte, P P. (2025) What does it mean to care in industrial agriculture? *Agriculture and Human Values* (42)

Mohawk, J. (2010) *Thinking in Indian: A John Mohawk Reader* (Fulcrum)

Moralli, M. (2024) Research as care: Positionality and reflexivity in qualitative migration research, *Qualitative Research* (24:3)

Morris, C. (2006) Negotiating the boundary between state-led and farmer approaches to knowing nature: an analysis of UK agri-environment schemes, *Geoforum* (37)

Morris, C., Potter, C. (1995) Recruiting the new conservationists: farmers' adoption of agri-environmental schemes in the UK, *Journal of Rural Studies* (11)

Moyer, W., Josling, T E. (2002) *Agricultural Policy Reform: Politics and processes in the EU and the US in the 1990s* (Ashgate)

Muirhead, B., Almås, R. (2012) The Evolution of Western Agricultural Policy since 1945, in, Almås, R., Campbell, H. (eds.) *Rethinking Agricultural Policy Regimes: Food Security, Climate Change, and the Future of Resilience of Global Agriculture* (Emerald Publishing Limited)

Murdoch, J., Ward, N. (1997) Governmentality and territoriality – the statistical manufacture of Britain's 'national farm', *Political Geography* (16)

Murphy, M. (2015) Unsettling care: Troubling transnational itineraries of care in feminist health practices, *Social Studies of Science* (45:5)

NAO (National Audit Office) (2019) Early review of the new farming programme, https://www.nao.org.uk/reports/early-review-of-the-new-farming-programme/ Accessed 1/3/26

Nast, H. (1994) The Politics of Knowing and the Political/Empiricist Emphasis in Feminist Geography, *Professional Geographer* (46)

National Farmers Union (NFU) (2024) Everything you need to know about the Landscape Recovery scheme, https://www.nfuonline.com/updates-and-information/everything-you-need-to-know-about-the-landscape-recovery-scheme/ Accessed12/8/25

NFU (2025a) Spending Review: Defra publishes detail behind its budget, https://www.nfuonline.com/news/spending-review-2025-defra-publishes-detail/ Accessed 20/3/26

NFU (2025b) *Understanding the role of the Agricultural Supply Chain Adjudicator*, https://www.nfuonline.com/updates-and-information/asca-essential-information/ Accessed 25/10/25

Nelson, H L. (1992) Against Caring, *The Journal of Clinical Ethics* (3:1)

OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development) (2001) The Uruguay round agreement on agriculture: an evaluation of its implementation in OECD countries, https://www.oecd.org/content/dam/oecd/en/publications/reports/2001/04/the-uruguay-round-agreement-on-agriculture_g1gh17c3/9789264192188-en.pdf Accessed 1/3/26

Parr, H. (2003) Medical Geography: Care and caring, *Progress in Human Geography* (27)

Partridge, J. (2026) 'The sums don't add up': UK farmers struggle as Iran war drives up costs, *The Guardian*, https://www.theguardian.com/business/2026/mar/14/farmers-struggle-iran-war-drives-up-costs-fuel-fertiliser Accessed 20/3/26

Pearce, S., Haigh, R. (2017) *The Theory and Practice of Democratic Therapeutic Community Treatment* (Jessica Kingley Publishers)

Phillips, E., Gray, I. (1995) Farming 'practice' as temporally and spatially situated intersections of biography, culture and social structure, *The Australian Geographer* (26:2)

Pigott, A. (2021) Hocus pocus? Spirituality and soil care in biodynamic agriculture, *Environment and Planning E* (4:4)

Popke, J. (2006) Geography and Ethics: Everyday mediations through care and consumption, *Progress in Human Geography* (30:4)

Portocarrero Lacayo, A V. (2024) Care is the new radical: food and climate approaches from a peasant feminist perspective, *The Journal of Peasant Studies* (51:6)

Potter, C. (1998) *Against the Grain: Agri-Environmental Reform in the United States and the European Union* (CABI)

Potter, C., Tilzey, M. (2005) Agricultural policy discourses in the European post-Fordist transition: neoliberalism, neomercantilism and multifunctionality, *Progress in Human Geography* (29:5)

Pronti, A., Mancinelli, S., Mazzanti, M., Crudell, L. (2025) The 'Good Farmer' concept and the diffusion of innovations in rural Africa, *Economica Politica* (42)

Puig de la Bellacasa, M. (2010) Ethical doings in naturecultures, *Ethics, Policy and Environment* (13:2)

Puig de la Bellacasa, M. (2015) Making time for soil: Technoscience futurity and the pace of care, *Social Studies of Science* (45)

Puig de la Bellacasa, M. (2017) *Matters of Care: Speculative ethics in more than human worlds* (University of Minnesota Press)

Puka, B. (1990) The Liberation of Caring: A Different Voice for Gilligan's "Different Voice", *Hypatia* (5:1)

Raghuram, P. (2021) Race and feminist care ethics: intersectionality as method, in, Mahmoudi, H., Brysk, A., Seaman, J. (eds.) *The Changing Ethos of Human Rights* (Edward Elgar)

Richards, C., Bjørkhaug, H., Lawrence, G., Hickman, E. (2013) Retailer-driven agricultural restructuring – Australia, the UK and Norway in comparison, *Agriculture and Human Values* (30)

Riley, D. (2017) Bourdieu's Class Theory: The Academic as Revolutionary, *Catalyst* (1:2)

Riley, M. (2016a) How does longer term participation in agri-environment schemes [re]shape farmers' environmental dispositions and identities? *Land Use Policy* (52)

Riley, M. (2016b) Still being the 'good farmer': (Non-)retirement and the preservation of farming identities in older age, *Sociologia Ruralis* (56:1)

Riley, M., Sangster, H., Smith, H., Chiverrell, R., Boyle, J. (2018) Will farmers work together for conservation? The potential limit of farmers' co-operation in agri-environment measures, *Land Use Policy* (70)

Roche, M., Argent, N. (2015) The fall and rise of agricultural productivism? An Antipodean viewpoint, *Progress in Human Geography* (39:5)

Rose, G. (1997) Situating knowledges: positionality, reflexivities and other tactics, *Progress in Human Geography* (21:3)

RPA (Rural Payments Agency) (2022) What is countryside stewardship? https://ruralpayments.blog.gov.uk/2022/06/16/what-is-countryside-stewardship/ Accessed 13/3/26

Rudnick, A. (2001) A Meta-Ethical Critique of Care Ethics, *Theoretical Medicine* (22)

Saugeres, L. (2002) The cultural representation of the farming landscape: masculinity, power and nature, *Journal of Rural Studies* (18:4)

Saunders, F P. (2016) Complex Shades of Green: Gradually Changing Notions of the 'Good Farmer' in a Swedish Context, *Sociologia Ruralis* (56:3)

Scheele, M. (1996) The Agri-environmental Measures in the Context of the CAP Reform, in, Whitby, M. (ed.) *The European Environment and CAP Reform* (CABI)

Scott, E. (2024) Environmental land management: Recent changes to the sustainable farming incentive and countryside stewardship schemes, *House of Lords Library*, https://lordslibrary.parliament.uk/environmental-land-management-recent-changes-to-the-sustainable-farming-incentive-and-countryside-stewardship-schemes/#heading-4 Accessed 1/3/26

Seth, A. Randall, G. (2020) *The Grocers: The rise and rise of the supermarket chains* (Kogan Page)

Seymour, M., Connelly, S. (2023) Regenerative agriculture and a more-than-human ethic of care: a relational approach to understanding transformation, *Agriculture and Human Values* (40)

Shears, P. (2013) The Groceries Supply Code of Practice: fairness for farmers? *International Journal of Agricultural Management* (3:1)

Shoard, M. (1980) *The Theft of the Countryside* (Temple Smith)

Shucksmith, M. (1993) Farm household behaviour and the transition to post-productivism, *Journal of Agricultural Economics* (44)

Silvasti, T. (2003) The cultural model of the "good farmer" and the environmental question in Finland, *Agriculture and Human Values* (20:2)

Singleton, V. (2012) When Contexts Meet: Feminism and Accountability in UK Cattle Farming, *Science, Technology and Human Values* (37:4)

Sismandan, D. (2019) Revisiting positionality and the thesis of situated knowledge, *Dialogues in Human Geographer* (9:2)

Sismondo, S. (2011) *An Introduction to Science and Technology Studies* (Wiley and Sons)

Skeggs, B. (2004) Exchange, Value and Affect: Bourdieu and 'The Self', *The Sociological Review* (52:2)

Smith, D A. (2015) *A Complete Understanding of the Groceries Supply Code of Practice* (Making Business Matter LTD) https://www.makingbusinessmatter.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/woocommerce_uploads/2020/11/A_Complete_Understanding-20151118-1534-ES-19-11-15-y7hcxn.pdf Accessed 25/10/25

Smith, D. (1992) Sociology from women's experience: a reaffirmation, *Sociological Theory* (10:1)

Spyrou, S. (2024) From extractivist practices and the child-as-data to an ethics of reciprocity and mutuality in empirical childhood research, *Childhood* (31:1)

Stock, P V. (2007) 'Good farmers' as reflexive producers: an examination of family organic producers in the US Midwest, *Sociologia Ruralis* (47)

Sutherland L-A., Darnhofer, I. (2012) Of organic farmers and 'good farmers': changing habitus in rural England, *Journal of Rural Studies* (28)

Sutherland, L-A. (2013) Can organic farmers be 'good farmers'? Adding the 'taste of necessity' to the conventionalization debate, *Agriculture and Human Values* (30)

Sutherland, L-A., Bâtie, C., Gröndal, H., Rousset, N. (2024) Of poultry and the good farmer: Skilled role performance in antimicrobial use on poultry farms in Sweden, France and Vietnam, *Sociologia Ruralis* (64:4)

Sutherland, L-A., Burton, R J F. (2011) Good farmers, good neighbours? The role of cultural capital in social capital development in a Scottish farming community, *Sociologia Ruralis* (51:3)

Sutherland, L-A., Calo, A. (2020) Assemblage and the 'good farmer': New entrants to crofting in Scotland, *Journal of Rural Studies* (80)

TallBear, K. (2019) Caretaking relations, not American dreaming, *Kalfou* (6:1)

Taverner, C. (2025) *Paying the Price Cheap food, big business and the cost to farming and food security.* Food, Farming and Countryside Commission, https://ffcc.co.uk/publications/paying-the-price Accessed 14/12/25

Thompson, C M. (2001) Situated Knowledge: Feminist and Science and Technology Studies Perspectives, in, Smelser, N J., Baltes, P B. (eds.) *International Encylopedia of Social and Behavioural Sciences* (Pergamon)

Tilzey, M. (2024) Ill Fares the Land: Confronting Unsustainability in the UK Food System through Political Agroecology and Degrowth, *Land* (13:5)

Todd, Z. (2016) An Indigenous Feminist's take on the ontological turn: 'ontology' is just another word for colonialism, *Journal of Historical Sociology* (29:1)

Toikko, T. (2016) Becoming an expert by lived experience: an analysis of service users' learning process, *Social Work in Mental Health* (14:3)

Tong, R. (1998) The ethics of care: A feminist virtue ethics of care for healthcare practitioners, *The Journal of Medicine and Philosophy* (23:2)

Topp, E., Stephan, A., Varela, E., Cicek, H., Plieninger, T. (2023) Mediterranean farmers' understandings of 'good soil management' and 'good farmer' identity in the context of conservation agriculture, *International Journal of Agricultural Sustainability* (22:1)

Towill, D. (2005) A perspective on UK supermarket pressure on the supply chain, *European Management Journal* (23:4)

Tronto, J C. (1993) *Moral Boundaries: A Political Argument for an Ethic of Care* (Routledge)

Tronto, J C. (2013) *Caring Democracy: Markets, equality and justice* (New York University Press)

Tronto, J C. (2015) Theories of care as a challenge to Weberian paradigms in social science, in, Engster, D., Hamington, M. (eds.) *Care Ethics and Political Theory* (Oxford University Press)

Tsouvalis, J., Seymour, S., Watkins, C. (2000) Exploring knowledge-cultures: Precision farming, yield mapping, and the expert-farmer interface, *Environment and Planning A* (32:5)

Tuck, E., Yang, K W. (2012) Decolonization is not a metaphor, *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education and Society* (1)

Tynan, L. (2021) What is relationality? Indigenous knowledges, practices and responsibilities with kin, *Cultural Geographies* (28:4)

Van Dooren, T. (2011) Invasive Species in Penguin Worlds: An Ethical Taxonomy of Killing for Conservation, *Conservation and Society* (9:4)

Vásquez-Fernández, A M. (2020) Resurgence of relationality: reflections on decolonizing and indigenizing 'sustainable development', *Current Opinion on Environmental Sustainability* (43)

Vigors, B., Wemelsfelder, F., Lawrence, A B., (2023) What symbolises a "good farmer" when it comes to farm animal welfare? *Journal of Rural Studies* (98)

Vogel, E. (2025) Good Digestion: The Metabolic Politics of Dutch Dairy Farming, *Cultural Anthropology* (40:1)

Wacquant, L D. (1989) Towards a Reflexive Sociology: A Workshop with Pierre Bourdieu, *Sociological Theory* (7:1)

Wacquant, L. (2011) Habitus as topic and tool: Reflections on becoming a prizefighter, *Qualitative Research in Psychology* (8:1)

Walford, N. (2003) Productivism is allegedly dead, long live productivism. Evidence of continued productivist attitudes and decision-making in South-East England, *Journal of Rural Studies* (19)

Walsh, Z., Böhme, J., Wamsler, C. (2021) Towards a relational paradigm in sustainability research, practice, and education, *Ambio* (50)

Walther, M. (2014) *Repatriation to France and Germany: A Comparative Study Based on Bourdieu's Theory of Practice* (Springer)

Ward, N. (1993) The agricultural treadmill and the rural environment in the post-productivist era, *Sociologia Ruralis* (33)

Ward, N., Clark, J., Lowe, P., Seymour, S. (1998) Keeping matters in its place: pollution regulation and reconfiguration of farmers and farming, *Environment and Planning A* (30)

Weis, T. (2019) Agriculture from Imperialism to Neoliberalism, in, Ness, I., Cope, Z. (eds.) *The Palgrave Encyclopaedia of Imperialism and Anti-Imperialism* (Palgrave Macmillan)

West, S., Haider, L J., Stålhammar, S., Woroniecki, S. (2020) A relational turn for sustainability science? Relational thinking, leverage points and transformations, *Ecosystems and People* (16:1)

Whatmore, S. (2006) Materialist returns: practising cultural geography in and for a more-than-human world, *Cultural Geographies* (13:4)

Wheeler, R., Morris, C., Lobley, M., Winter, M. (2018) 'The good guys are doing it anyway': the accommodation of environmental concern among English and Welsh farmers, *Environment and Planning E* (1:4)

Whitby, M. (1996) The Prospect for Agri-environmental Policies within a Reformed CAP, in, Whitby, M., (ed.) *The European Environment and CAP Reform: Policies and Prospects for Conservation* (CABI)

White, W. (2024) What does the government's farming budget mean for Environmental Land Management? *Sustain Blog*, https://www.sustainweb.org/blogs/nov24-farming-budget-elms/ Accessed 13/3/26

Whyte, K P., Cuomo, C. (2017) Ethics of caring in environmental ethics: Indigenous and feminist philosophies, in, Gardiner, S M., Thompson, A. (eds.) *The Oxford Handbook of Environmental Ethics* (Oxford University Press)

Wilson, G A. (1996) Farmer environmental attitudes and ESA participation, *Geoforum* (27:2)

Wilson, G A. (1997) Assessing the environmental impact of the Environmentally Sensitive Areas scheme: a case for using farmers' environmental knowledge? *Landscape Research* (22:3)

Wilson, G A. (2001) From productivism to post-productivism…and Back Again? Exploring the (Un)changed Nature and Mental Landscapes of European Agriculture, *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* (26:1)

Wilson, G A. (2004) The Australian Landcare movement: Towards 'post-productivist' rural governance, *Journal of Rural Studies* (20)

Wilson, G A. (2008) From 'weak' to 'strong' multifunctionality: Conceptualising farm-level multifunctional transitional pathways, *Journal of Rural Studies* (24)

Wilson, G A., Rigg, J. (2003) 'Post-productivist' agricultural regimes and the South: discordant concepts? *Progress in Human Geography* (27)

Wilson, O., Wilson, G A. (1997) Common cause of common concern? The role of common lands in the post-productivist countryside, *Area* (29)

Yang, Y. (2014) Bourdieu, Practice and Change: Beyond the criticism of determinism, *Education Philosophy and Theory* (46:14)

Yarwood, R., Evans, N. (1999) The Changing Geography of Rare Livestock Breeds in Britain, *Geography* (84:1)

Chapter 3: Methodology

1. Introduction

I have explored some of the justifications for my research approach in Chapter 2 and a more phenomenological account of the experience is covered further in Chapter 4. Within this chapter, my aim is to present the information required for a thesis methodology chapter (and reliable, reproducible and replicable research), and to do so in a way that reflects the transparency I am trying to give within this thesis.

2. Grounded Theory

Before delving into the more practical elements of this research, it would be helpful to give a brief overview of grounded theory and its implications for research. Grounded theory was developed in response to discussions on what 'scientific' research is, or should be, similar to that discussed in the previous chapter. It was developed in the 1960s, in response to qualitative research's "subordinate status within social science research" (Dunne, 2011: 112). The parents of grounded theory (Glaser and Strauss, 1967) wanted to move away from "extreme empiricism" (Goulding, 1998: 51) and subvert qualitative research traditions which generated theory *a priori* before data collection. As Dey writes, grounded theory was an effort to "liberate theory from the seductive comforts of the armchair and empirical research from the uninspiring and restrictive confines of analysing variables or verifying hypotheses" (2004: 82).

Grounded theory was initially developed by Glaser and Strauss, who have now gone separate ways regarding their perspectives on what 'true' grounded theory is. The result of this split is that there are a range of ways to interpret grounded theory, depending on whose 'church' the author attends (May, 1996; Melia, 1996). However, there are core similarities between the various denominations. At its core, grounded theory aims to induce theory from data, rather than the other way around (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). Rather than testing hypotheses with data, this approach places data above pre-determined theory, making it a good fit for this thesis' aim to reduce the hierarchy between researcher and researched (Dunne, 2011: 111). On a philosophical basis, grounded theory stems from symbolic interactionism which sees people as "active participants in creating meaning", believing that perceptions of reality are created from people's interpretation of symbols (shared meanings attached to surroundings and social practices) that surround them (Cutliffe, 2000: 1477; see also Morse and Field, 1995). In this

manner, grounded theory aims to understand how people, or a group of people, understand their reality and what patterns emerge from this (Stern et al., 1982). Grounded theory is frequently used when little is known about a phenomenon (Creswell and Poth, 2018). For reasons I have already discussed in Chapter 2, I employed this technique to better centre farmer perspectives and move away from more 'extractivist' methodologies (Moralli, 2024).

Glaser and Strauss 'divorced' on the grounds of irreconcilable differences, as they each held different ontological and epistemological views (Howard-Payne, 2015). Ontologically, Glaser took a post-positivist approach which assumes a reality exists independently of human perception, but recognises that this reality can only be known imperfectly (Reed, 2012). Strauss, on the other hand, 'remarried' and developed a constructivist approach to grounded theory with Corbin (Strauss and Corbin, 1998). This approach views reality as always contextually situated and socially constructed. Haraway's concept of situated knowledges, discussed prior, aligns more closely with the constructivist approach, emphasising that knowledge is partial, embodied, and socially situated, while rejecting both positivist claims to objectivity and extreme relativism (1988).

Epistemologically, Glaser argued that the researcher be objective and detached (Madill et al., 2000). Strauss, on the other hand, felt that all findings are constructive "by inter-subjective understandings of the phenomenon being investigated" (Howard-Payne, 2015). In this manner, the researcher is unavoidably part of the research process and thus encouraged to actively engage with the process of data collection. I adopt the Straussian approach, specifically the interpretivist approach which allows for my own prior knowledge and wider literature to add context and analytical rigour (Sebastian, 2019). The Straussian 'school' also better reflects my own ontological views, as discussed previously and within the next chapter. Whilst I adopt this interpretivist approach, grounded theory still allows me to give more equal footing to the perspectives of interviewees. However, as I have noted, my role as author still gives me a degree of privilege when it comes to what appears in this thesis (Nast, 1994; McLafferty, 1995: 437). This theoretical approach does not mean uncritically amplifying the perspectives of interviewees – I am not aiming to valorise everything said by interviewees as objective truth or inherently unproblematic. Overly romanticising the perspectives given is another road to objectification, and would not fit with the relational epistemology guiding this project. An interpretivist approach allows me to respect and foreground farmers' views, and still use my own knowledge and expertise to shape the subsequent papers.

The final main divergence between Glaser and Strauss concerns when the literature should be engaged with. In their original text on the subject, both Glaser and Strauss argued that a substantive literature review should not be conducted prior to data collection. Glaser remained loyal to this perspective (1978, 1998) but Strauss later advocated for a 'light' review of the relevant literature (Strauss and Corbin, 1998). Justifications for the Straussian approach to the literature review are covered in more detail elsewhere (Dunne, 2011), but suffice to say that it is this perspective that I align with. Firstly, a literature review was a requirement of the first year of my PhD, something which is recognised within grounded theory literature (e.g. Nathaniel, 2006). A prior literature review allowed me to better orient myself in fieldwork, avoid repeating pre-existing arguments, and as previously discussed, did not become an unsurmountable obstacle to pivoting towards more grounded theoretical perspectives after fieldwork (see Dunne, 2011 for an overview of the literature review debate in grounded theory). An adage which had floated around this body of literature sums this up nicely: that there is "something ludicrous about pretending to be a theoretical virgin"[4].

I will cover the exact details of my sampling approach in Section 4.2, but, fortunately, my approach was tacitly in line with the grounded theory guidelines. I had minimal pre-existing restrictions on interviewee engagement and did not set out with a desired number of participants to achieve (Cutliffe, 2000). Grounded theory often advocates for the use of 'memos' during the fieldwork process (Chun Tie et al., 2019). Whilst I didn't intentionally produce memos, I am an active keeper of a diary and regularly engaged in reflective writing during my fieldwork and afterwards – much of which forms the content of the following chapter.

There may be some grounded theory purists who disagree with the decision to pivot following fieldwork and deem it a bastardisation of grounded theory. I will not repeat my justifications for this move, but I will point to broader literature which supports "tinkering with" grounded theory (Stern, 1994; see also Cutliffe, 2000; Morse, 2006). The Straussian approach in particular adopts a 'looser' approach to the theoretical application, in contrast to

[4] I say 'adage' because this quote is a bit ubiquitous – I first came across it in Dunne (2011), who cited it from Clarke (2005), who cited it from Elkin (2003). Elkin's work, which is not about grounded theory but rather Visual Studies, doesn't contain this direct quote, but does attribute the phrase 'theoretical virgin' to a colleague of theirs (Robert Loescher). There's an irony in all of this - Elkin's work defines such 'virgins' in contrast to the "theoretically promiscuous" (2003: 31), and yet the former has travelled further through the academic literature than most! I have included this little sidebar as I think it says something about the way academia sometimes encourages superficial, 'skimming' engagement with literature – see Mountz et al (2015) – something I discuss further in Chapter 4.

the rigidity of the Glaserian tradition (Charmaz, 2024: 8). Grounded theory is an established approach within agrarian rural studies, including uncovering farmer perceptions and behavioural motivations (Braun, 2021; Frias-Navarro and Montoya-Restrepo, 2020; Parak et al., 2022; Fan et al., 2024; Bitsch, 2005; Räty et al., 2023).

3. Research Aims and Approach

I was fortunate in that my research design was constructed in such a way that my decision to 'relax' my policy specific focus was possible because of the way I conducted interviews initially. I wanted to understand how farmers felt about recent policy changes, but I was acutely aware that it would not have been possible or ethical to position myself as an 'expert' on the lived reality of farming. I spent the first one to two years of my thesis largely on desk-based research related to historical and present agricultural policy – the outcome of which was presented in the previous chapter. I did attend a series of agricultural shows during this time and, as is covered in more detail in Chapter 4, I conducted a 'pilot' interview with a farmer local to where I grew up. My discomfort with positioning myself as an expert on farming, especially as an early career researcher, meant that I was very open about my broad scope and intention to let interviewees lead the discussion when contacting farmers. I discuss the nuts and bolts of the sample size in Section 4.2, but to illustrate my broader approach, the following is an extract from my initial contact with potential interviewees:

"*A little about my research…my goal is to delve deep into farmers' opinions and experiences on the industry today, how it has changed over time and how they feel towards the future of the industry. I'm interested in understanding more about a farmer's personal journey to and with farming and how bigger topics like politics and sustainability interact with this experience. Essentially, not just what farmers think but how they think, and which factors are influential in shaping farming thought and practice.*"

My initial contact with farmers – done through emails and letters – was intended to be open and down-to-earth and I didn't want to come across as someone shouting jargon down from an ivory tower. As I have already outlined, the depth and breadth of knowledge needed to understand the reality of farming is not something possible to acquire in a couple of years of largely desk-based research. If I had taken the jargon-hurling approach, I probably would have made a fool of myself and put people off. My goal when contacting farmers was to show that I was open to hearing their voices and opinions – the policy specific 'aim' was in my back pocket, but even at this stage, I was starting to feel uncomfortable about

pigeonholing interview outcomes too much. The research questions for this thesis are therefore intentionally very broad:

1. What motivates and sustains farmers in their practice?
2. What challenges do farmers feel are particularly pertinent for them at this time?
3. How are farmers responding to changing contexts?
4. How, if at all, do these challenges differ from policy and governance narratives?

The first question is intended to generate space and curiosity within the research for participants' own histories and relationships with their practice to come to the fore. This is in response to literature which argues for an understanding of farming that goes beyond a purely economic framework (Wilson, 2008), including how the relational aspects of agriculture are often omitted from policy and governance discussions (Brown et al., 2021). The literature I am citing here is that which I was familiar with prior to fieldwork (which occurred in 2023). I would later come across further literature which backs up this approach, such as how the care-full relationality present within agriculture is often missed within policy discourse (Curry, 2002), but this did not inform my initial approach, as I was unfamiliar with these texts at this time. These first two questions were also informed by my own personal experience. As a lived experience mental health practitioner, I had developed a keen understanding of how important it is for people to be allowed agency to tell their own 'stories' about their history. Alongside this, I have deep personal attachments to specific 'pockets' of land (as discussed further in Chapter 4), and I wanted to allow these potential attachments held by farmers to be given space. Question three allows for comparison to be made between the narratives present within the desk-based aspects of research and the narratives expressed by farmers. This is a research question that is answered within this thesis – see Chapter 5 – but it was an aim that I also moved 'with and beyond' through my uses of grounded theory, which I will discuss below.

Question four was designed to see if the changes farmers are making in response to current contexts align with the same 'direction' as policy aims. Prior to fieldwork, I would have said that I wanted to see, for example, if farmers were engaging in any of the agri-environmental schemes under ELMS and so forth. I do feel that I answer this research question in this thesis, but the 'changing contexts' that I had in the back of my mind broadened from just policy to include economic factors as well. Question three is also very broad because I wanted to allow space for the non-practical types of responses to come to the fore if

volunteered. That is, if farmers wanted to express how they are responding on a more emotional level to these changing contexts (feelings of anger, hope, despair, etc.), I wanted the research questions not to 'block' those out. However, from an ethical perspective, it would not be appropriate to demand emotional intimacy from interviewees if it was not freely given. I might ask questions such as "how do you feel about that?" but I did not approach farmers with research questions that required emotional vulnerability from them.

I chose to focus my study on England rather than the whole of the UK, for two main reasons. Firstly, the practical constraints associated with in-depth interviews meant that attempting to include all four nations could have resulted in poor saturation, especially within particular demographics. Secondly, and most importantly, the devolved nations have their own unique farming cultures and operate under different agricultural policies. Attempting to 'stretch' my analysis across all British nations risked doing injustice to these variables.

4. How this Research was Carried Out

4.1 Arranging Interviews

This research aimed to gather rich, qualitative data that enables theoretically informed and interpretive insights to be drawn, rather than statistical generalisation. Therefore, the sample is non-representative. A comprehensive sample size was ensured by using a maximum variation approach to ensure diversity across farm size, type and location with the aim of capturing a 'snapshot' of farmers' lived experience which generates an overarching understanding of the profession. This study adhered to principles of informed consent, confidentiality, and participant anonymity, and received ethical approval from Lancaster University. Anonymity is ensured through the use of numerical identifiers for participants (e.g. P1, P2) and further information is redacted when appropriate.

Practically speaking, I split a map of England into sections (North East, North West, Midlands, South East and South West). Within these sections, I then listed counties and used a regional internet search, primarily Yellow Pages, to contact participants within these counties. I did this in a staggered manner so that interviews within specific areas could be done around the same time – this was to avoid having, for example, an interview in Cumbria on Monday and then an interview in Devon on Tuesday of the same week. I contacted participants by email, post, and telephone depending on what information was available online. Some farmers interviewed, especially those who were older, would not have been reachable by email and so this approach allowed me to get a broader range of perspectives. I

also recruited some participants via word of mouth and/or snowball sampling, such as a participant giving me the contact details of a peer.

4.2 Sample Details

My final sample size was 41 interviews. Farm sizes ranged from under 20 hectares to over 100 hectares and included 11 mixed farms, 18 livestock farms (four mixed livestock, five beef, five dairy, two sheep, one goat, one egg production), seven arable and five horticultural. Whilst it would have been beneficial to include farms which specialise in broiler and pork production, there was no uptake within these areas, potentially due to heightened concerns around privacy and external scrutiny that are widely reported within these livestock industries (Hockenhull et al., 2019; Garnier et al., 2022; Case, 2025; Clarke, 2025). Farm size was recorded using discrete categories, aligned with those used within UK government data (DEFRA, 2025). In retrospect, the "100+ hectares" category should have been subdivided as 23 farms fell within this group, a substantial proportion of the whole dataset. Many of these farms, as interviews revealed, were significantly larger than 100 hectares, and additional upper-tier categories would have provided greater nuance when analysing size variation. Participants ranged from their 20s to their 80s and represented early-, mid-, and later-career farmers, although no participant had farmed for less than five years. Geographically, interviewees were distributed across the North-East (five), North-West (12), Midlands (six), South-East (eight), and South-West (ten). Two interviews were conducted with semi-retired farmers, both of whom still resided on and engaged with their farms, but most farm work was contracted out. The majority of interviews (33) were conducted with a single participant, but it was not uncommon for a secondary participant to join the discussion, with this occurring in eight interviews. This was embraced during the interview process, as multi-person interviews have been shown to reveal new information and co-constructed narratives (Riley, 2014). In such cases, demographic information and written consent were gathered from the lead participant and verbal consent was confirmed from the secondary participant during the interview process. Of the primary participants interviewed, 33 were male and eight were female. Table 1 contains individual participants details.

Participant Number	Location	Farm Size (hectares)	Farm Type
1	South East	>20	Mixed
2	Midlands	20-50	Livestock (Beef)
3	North West	20-50	Mixed
4	North West	20-50	Mixed
5	North West	100+	Livestock (Mixed)
6	North West	100+	Livestock (Dairy)
7	South East	100+	Horticulture
8	South East	20-50	Horticulture
9	South East	100+	Arable
10	Midlands	20-50	Livestock (Sheep)
11	Midlands	>20	Mixed
12	Midlands	100+	Mixed
13	North West	50-100	Livestock (Sheep)
14	North West	20-50	Arable
15	North West	>20	Horticulture
16	Midlands	50-100	Arable
17	North West	100+	Livestock (Poultry, Eggs)
18	Redacted[5]	>20	Livestock (Goats)
19	North East	100+	Arable
20	North East	50-100	Arable
21	North East	100+	Arable
22	North East	100+	Mixed
23	North East	100+	Mixed
24	Midlands	>20	Livestock (Sheep)
25	North West	100+	Horticulture
26	North West	100+	Mixed
27	North West	50-100	Livestock (Sheep)
28	South East	100+	Mixed
29	South East	100+	Mixed
30	South East	100+	Livestock (Dairy)
31	South East	100+	Horticulture
32	South West	20-50	Livestock (Beef)
33	South West	100+	Livestock (Dairy)
34	South West	100+	Arable
35	South West	50-100	Livestock (Beef)
36	South West	100+	Mixed
37	South West	100+	Livestock (Beef)
38	South West	100+	Livestock (Dairy)
39	South West	100+	Livestock (Sheep)
40	South West	100+	Livestock (Dairy)
41	South West	20-50	Livestock (Beef)

Table 1: Individual Participant Details

[5] As goat farms are relatively rare in England, I have chosen to obscure this detail to ensure anonymity.

If possible, “mobile methods” were used in these interviews, and so location varied (von Benzon, 2023). Interviews took place in offices, participant homes, and, when possible, whilst walking around the farm itself, with one taking place both on-farm and in a car whilst the interviewee drove to collect a piece of machinery. Whilst initial contact suggested a ‘walk-and-talk’ approach, the location was left to participant preference out of respect for farmers’ time and capacity, including the fact that some participants had restricted mobility (Riley et al., 2021).

4.2.1 Sample Limitations

There are some potential limitations inherent to the sample size and style of this research. This large and broad sample is beneficial due to its ability to capture a range of perspectives and potentially identify narratives present across the whole farm sector. Whilst narrower sample sizes can be, and are, used in conjunction with grounded theory, this methodological approach is particularly welcoming to broader sample sizes (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). However, there is a risk that such a broad sample misses any sector-specific nuances, especially as some farm types are represented only superficially (such as stand-alone egg production) and others unrepresented (stand-alone broiler poultry and pork production). To an extent, this a limitation I accept rather than deny. However, an inverse sample type, such as interviewing only one type of farm, may face similar feedback as to how any claims made may be (un)representative of the whole farming sector. Retrospectively, it may have been beneficial to structure my sample with similar numbers of each farm type (even if all types could not be accounted for) such as five dairy, five beef, five arable, etc. This was not done mainly due to the practical and time constraints of having only a specific timeframe within each geographical area, but I do accept that this approach would have allowed for deeper analysis at times. Another retrospective reflection is that it could have been beneficial to ask interviewees for their farm business income and how much of this comes from sale of agricultural products, for example. However, there are ethical implications to demanding such personal data, which farmers may have felt uncomfortable sharing if they had not offered the information voluntarily

Despite these drawbacks, this sample did offer specific benefits *because* of its breadth. For example, as discussed in Chapter 6, farmer perspectives on the impact of policy contained some differences from other literature on agri-environmental schemes. Previous literature on this topic has employed sampling that targeted farmers engaged with such schemes, although

to varying degrees. For example, Cusworth and Dodsworth (2021) and Cusworth (2020) sampled only participants who were contract holders in the 2005-2014 Environmental Stewardship Scheme, specifically those engaged with the Entry Level Stewardship portion. Burton et al. (2008) ensured approximately half their participants were engaged in agri-environmental schemes, and Riley (2016) chose participants who were eligible for either the Environmentally Sensitive Areas scheme or Countryside Stewardship Schemes (discussed in Riley, 2005, 2006). It is assumed that these studies contacted participants with the focus of their work (agri-environmental schemes) being stated. This could have created a sample bias of participants who had particular perspectives on scheme involvement and/or who felt they had 'something' to say on the matter. Perhaps because of my diverse sample type, relatively open-ended sampling approach and interview structure (with initial contact with participants foregrounding this), my data found more diverse responses from farmers than was anticipated, as discussed in Chapters 5 and 7.

This is not to criticise the above studies (which have been illuminating throughout this doctorate) nor to suggest that the authors are unaware of sampling implications, but rather to outline that diverse sampling approaches being employed across the field has merits and can produce an important range of insights. The 'open-ended' nature of my initial contact with farmers will also have impacted the responses, and so this sample bias is accepted here.

Whilst there are minor changes, such as more uniform representation of farm types, that I would implement if I was to repeat this study, overall, I find the benefits of this sample, especially in combination with the open and farmer-led approach used, outweigh the limitations.

4.3 How the Interviews Were Conducted[6]

As I have already outlined, these interviews took place in a range of settings and were intended to be open-ended. There were six guiding themes for each interview, but

[6] The photo on the 'cover' of this thesis is taken from one of the interviews – I put it on the cover because I think it portrays a lot of the themes addressed within this work. The calculator and cheque book representing the significance of economic contexts to farmers, the kitchen table mats with various animals on them signifying that this is 'work' that often overlaps deeply with personal 'home' life. I wouldn't go so far as to say my role as a researcher is embedded within farmers' life, but I think the overlapping of my original letter within this farmer's wider possessions and the fact that you can see my name written on the calendar in pen speaks to the overlapping that occurs between the researcher, interview participants, and the preceding research outputs. I edited this photo to ensure no identifying or personal information can be seen, and I asked for the interviewees verbal consent to take it. If any parts of it look a little strange it is because, for all my skills, photo editing is not one of them!

discussions remained semi-structured to encourage a participant led interview approach and allow for "spontaneous information" to be disclosed (Gilbert, 2001: 126). These themes were as follows: farmer history; history of the farmland and enterprise; motivations for farming and what being a farmer means to the individual; policy impact; increased focus on sustainability within farm practice; predictions for the future of farming both on an individual and industry-wide scale. The first two themes were explored to allow for a holistic, qualitative method of enquiry to be developed, rather than a broader, more abstract perspective which is seen within quantitative methods (Sutherland, 2010: 417).

Practically speaking, these interviews were relatively long – lasting one to two hours. An upside of a background within the therapeutic field is that one begins to understand that there is rarely such thing as 'off topic'. If a farmer particularly wanted to tell me about something, even if this wasn't covered in the six guiding themes, then they were more than welcome to. I also take a very relational approach to interviewing (Fujii, 2017). The text I have just cited is one I did not read until after I have completed my fieldwork, but the description of relational interviewing given aligns with the way I conducted interviews, which was grounded in my therapeutic experience. A background in talking therapies, including professional training (*good* employers of lived experience practitioners will ensure some ground level training is given), is what led to me automatically adopt this type of interviewing.

I do not take a positivist approach to interviewing, where the researcher attempts to remain "detached from the interviewee and interview context and free of personal values, interests, and emotions" (Fujii, 2017: 8). This doesn't mean I am not thoughtful about information about myself that I offer – I didn't introduce myself to farmers with "Hello, I'm Grace and I used to be a vegan", for example (see Nye and Wheeler, 2023 for disclosure surrounding veganism and other such topics). However, I was happy to offer up my own experiences in response to questions directed back at me. There's a level of intuitive discernment required here, and there were times when I did hold back my own perspective so that the interviewee felt comfortable in expressing their own. For example, one participant who didn't believe that climate change was caused by human activity asked me what I thought about it. The response I gave was honest (I do think it is caused by human activity) but I didn't disclose much further detail on this, as I wanted to leave as much of a non-judgemental space as possible for participant opinions to be expressed. Whilst I can never truly know what my own positionality means to interviewees (see Rose, 1997), I tried my best to communicate to

participants that what mattered was their honest opinions. To illustrate this, here are some snippets of things I said during interviews:

"*I like to let the data lead me, to be honest. And so if I find that people… if the data really wants to talk about, I don't know, a lack of scientific research or something, then that's what it will focus on.*" (Interview Five)

"*I always say that, if people tell me what they think I want to hear, it doesn't do me any good, my research would then be useless.*" (Interview 21)

"Grace: *Because, again, I'm not the expert here, and so you know what's important.*
Participant: *I'm not sure that I am, either, Grace.*
Grace: *Well, you're certainly more than I am.*
Participant: *Well, okay. All right, I might take that one.*
Grace: *Yeah, I think you probably will win that one.*
Participant: *Yeah, okay. I'll Top Trump you there.*" (Interview 12)

You can see in the first example that I am already starting to move towards my decision to employ Grounded Theory (Glaser and Strauss, 1967)! This decision was also influenced by the perspectives put forward by farmers themselves, who often voiced frustration with the dominance of 'outsider' voices regarding agricultural decisions:

"*the thing that really frustrates me and I think fellow farmers as well, is that we've got multi-generations who know how the land words, how the environment has changed… We live that day in and day out. Yet we are allowing people outside of the industry, albeit with great scientific knowledge and stuff that we value and we need, it's not that we have all the answers by a long way. But it's almost like farmers have been forgotten in this whole process. That's the bit that grates.*" P6

"*But a lot of the questions and the paperwork and everything, is designed and comes from people who don't know what they're talking about, which is really frustrating. As a farmer I can see it. They can't see it. The most ridiculous things come up and you think, "Well, there's somebody sat behind a desk, hasn't got a clue what we're talking about and have come up with these questions." They're vital I get it right, if you see what I mean. So, that's very frustrating. You've got no farming background, at all?*" P9

The ending of this question – "*You've got no farming background, at all?*" – speaks volumes regarding my positionality and role, both literal and perceived, within this research. In fact, one participant noted that I represent to him the type of person who enacts these roles:

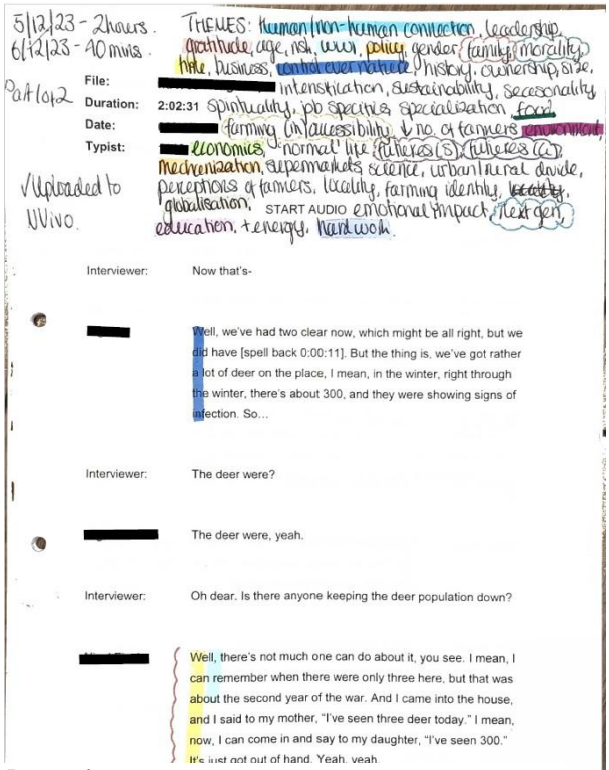
"*I've been involved in a lot of those conversations at significant high levels. A lot of the 20-somethings that live…Probably exactly like you, to be fair, to be absolutely honest. Mid-20s, little girlies in the middle of Defra that actually are very good at their jobs. They do a lot of research. They don't understand when they start, they do a lot of research, they put a lot of effort into it and come up with plans that'll work. Consultations with people like us, as agriculture, and politicians and NGOs… It then gets up to who has got to pay for it level and the wheels come off.*" P17

These perspectives do not act as 'truths' regarding the value of the expertise and perspectives of non-farming actors, nor do they necessarily represent the views of the entire sample (who may have different perspectives and simply did not discuss the topic). However, they do uncover that the centring of farmer perspectives is something desired by members of the community. Responding to these perspectives was another motivator for my decision to implement grounded theory. This is a good segue into how I 'handled' the interview data.

5. How Interview Data Was Analysed

I transcribed some interview recordings myself, but the vast majority were transcribed by an external company. This is permitted by the Lancaster University Ethics Committee and was made clear as a potential possibility to participants. The transcription service used was required to sign a confidentiality agreement, which you can find in Appendix 1. Following transcription, I undertook several rounds of 'coding'. I have lost count of how many times I read over the transcripts in total! I started with 'manual' coding. Practically speaking, this looks like printing out each transcript (physical copies stored in line with Lancaster University Ethics approval) and reading through each one looking for themes. Following grounded theory, I initially used open coding to identify emerging themes (Chun Tie et al., 2019). The result was many used highlighters and highly annotated transcripts – see Picture 1. I uploaded all of these themes and quotes as 'codes' into NVivo. What followed was a process of following my nose, jumping between emerging themes and literature, using theory inductively (Charmaz, 2006), and returning to the literature when my themes were not supported by the theory I had engaged with before my fieldwork period. As the 'shape' of the following papers emerged, I did advanced coding in NVivo to look for patterns between

demographic information, such as farm size or type, and the emergent themes. However, given the non-representative nature of this sample and limited subgroup sizes, patterns or groupings should be interpreted cautiously. This is made clear within the following papers.


5/12/23 - 2hours.
6/12/23 - 40 mins.
Part 1 of 2
File: [redacted]
Duration: 2:02:31
Date: [redacted]
Typist: [redacted]
Uploaded to NVivo
THEMES: human/non-human connection, leadership, gratitude, age, risk, uncertainty, policy, gender, family, morality, title, business, control over nature, history, ownership, size, intensification, sustainability, seasonality, spirituality, job specifics, specialisation, food, farming (in)accessibility, type of farmers, enjoyment, economics, 'normal' life, fathers (1), fathers (2), mechanisation, supermarkets, science, urban/rural divide, perceptions of farmers, locality, farming identity, [redacted], globalisation, START AUDIO, emotional impact, next gen, education, + energy, hard work

Interviewer: Now that's-

[redacted] Well, we've had two clear now, which might be all right, but we did have [spell back 0:00:11]. But the thing is, we've got rather a lot of deer on the place, I mean, in the winter, right through the winter, there's about 300, and they were showing signs of infection. So...

Interviewer: The deer were?

[redacted] The deer were, yeah.

Interviewer: Oh dear. Is there anyone keeping the deer population down?

[redacted] Well, there's not much one can do about it, you see. I mean, I can remember when there were only three here, but that was about the second year of the war. And I came into the house, and I said to my mother, "I've seen three deer today." I mean, now, I can come in and say to my daughter, "I've seen 300." It's just got out of hand. Yeah, yeah.

Picture 1

I did return to the practical realities of farming in the Spring of 2024, to assist with (mainly observing!) lambing with an interviewee and their family. This sort of thing isn't really included in the way data are analysed in grounded theory, but it felt important to me to not become too distanced from the reality of farming whilst I was analysing data. I don't present any detail of this within this thesis – it was always intended to be informal and was not covered within my Ethics application. However, this gave me the chance to talk through some of the ideas for emerging papers with someone who had lived experience, to garner their opinions. There aren't specific takeaways from this that I can delve into here, but I hope it illustrates my commitment to staying engaged with and learning from those who engaged with my research.

6. What Themes Emerged From This Research?

I focused my attention on themes which were most salient within interviews and with the most significance for contributions to the existing literature, to avoid repeating what is already established. These themes are as follows:

1. The perceived significance of corporate (specifically retail) influence on farming practice (in contrast to policy) and the omission of this perspective from productivism/post-productivism literature.
2. The centrality of care as a component of practice which allows for meaningful knowledge to be generated.
3. The disjunction between changing expectations and demands placed on farmers, the practice of care, and economic contexts.

4. The tensions and fragmentation regarding how farmers' identities are responding to changing economic and policy contexts.

These themes inform the following chapters of this thesis, as will now be explored.

References

Bitsch, V. (2005) Qualitative research: A grounded theory example and evaluation criteria, *Journal of Agribusiness* (23:1)

Braun, A C. (2021) Encroached by pine and eucalyptus? A grounded theory on an environmental conflict between forest industry and smallholder livelihoods in Chile, *Journal of Rural Studies* (82)

Brown, C., Kovács, E., Herzon, I., Villamayor-Tomas, S., Albizua, A., Galanaki, A., Grammatikopoulou, I., McCracken, D., Alkan Olsson, J., Zinnegrebe, Y. (2011) Simplistic understandings of farmer motivations could undermine the environmental potential of the common agricultural policy, *Land Use Policy* (101)

Burton, R J F., Kuczera, C., Schwarz, G. (2008) Exploring farmers' cultural resistance to voluntary agri-environmental schemes, *Sociologia Ruralis* (48)

Case, P. (2025) Pig farmers warned over surge in activist incursions, *Farmers Weekly*, https://www.fwi.co.uk/news/crime/pig-farmers-warned-over-surge-in-activist-incursions Accessed 30/12/25

Charmaz, K. (2006) *Constructing Grounded Theory: A Practical Guide through Qualitative Analysis* (SAGE)

Chun Tie, Y., Birks, M., Francis, K. (2019) Grounded theory research: A design framework for novice researchers, *SAGE Open Medicine* (7)

Clarke, A E. (2005) *Situational Analysis* (SAGE)

Clarke, P. (2025) Anti-broiler chicken group accused of 'intimidating' farmers, *Farmers Weekly*, https://www.fwi.co.uk/livestock/poultry/anti-broiler-chicken-group-accused-of-intimidating-farmers Accessed 30/12/25

Creswell, J W., Poth, C N. (2018) *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches* (SAGE)

Curry, J M. (2002) Care Theory and 'Caring' Systems of Agriculture, *Agriculture and Human Values* (19)

Cusworth G., Dodsworth, J. (2021) Using the 'good farmer' concept to explore agricultural attitudes to the provision of public goods. A case study of participants in an English agri-environmental scheme, *Agriculture and Human Values* (38)

Cusworth, G. (2020) Falling short of being the 'good farmer': losses of social and cultural capital incurred through environmental mismanagement, and the long-term impacts agri-environment scheme participation, *Journal of Rural Studies* (75)

Cutliffe, J R. (2000) Methodological issues in grounded theory, *Journal of Advanced Nursing* (31:6)

DEFRA (Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs) (2025) Agricultural facts: Summary, https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/agricultural-facts-england-regional-profiles/agricultural-facts-summary Accessed 24/2/26

Dey, I. (2004) Grounded Theory, in, Seale, C., Gobo, G., Gubriumn, J F., Silverman, D. (eds.) *Qualitative Research Practice* (Sage)

Dunne, C. (2011) The place of the literature review in grounded theory research, *International Journal of Social Research Methodology* (14:2)

Elkin, J. (2003) *Visual Studies: A Skeptical Introduction* (Routledge)

Fan, X., Wang, Z., Wang. Y. (2025) Rural Business Environments, Information Channels, and Farmers' Pesticide Utilization Behaviour: A Grounded Theory Analysis in Hainan Province, China, *Agriculture* (14:2)

Frias-Navarro, R., Montoya-Restrepo, L A. (2020) Understanding Knowledge Creation Processes among Rural Communities in Post-Conflict Settings in Colombia, *Knowledge Management and E-Learning* (12:2)

Fujii, L A. (2017) *Interviewing in social science research: A relational approach* (Taylor and Francis)

Garnier, M., van Wessel, M., Tamás, P A., van Bommel, S. (2022) Chickens, Inc.: Was UK Newspapers' Framing of the Chicken Meat Production Industry Compatible with Holding Corporate Power to Account? *Journalism Studies* (24:1)

Gilbert, G. (2001) *Researching Social Life* (Sage)

Glaser, B G. (1978) *Theoretical Sensitivity: Advances in the Methodology of Grounded Theory* (Sociology Press)

Glaser, B G. (1998) *Doing grounded theory: Issues and discussions* (Sociology Press)

Glaser, B G., Strauss, A L. (1967) *The Discovery of Grounded Theory* (Aldine)

Goulding, C. (1998) Grounded theory: The missing methodology on the interpretivist agenda, *Qualitative Market Research: An International Journal* (1:1)

Haraway, D. (1988) Situated Knowledges: The science question in feminism and the privilege of partial perspective, *Feminist Studies* (14:3)

Hockenhull, J., Main, D C J., Mullan, S. (2019) 'Would it sell more pork?' Pig farmers' perceptions of Real Welfare, the welfare outcome component of their farm assurance scheme, *Animal* (13:12)

Howard-Payne, L. (2015) Glaser or Strauss? Considerations for selecting a grounded theory study, *South African Journal of Psychology* (46:1)

Lincoln, Y S., Guba, E G. (1985) *Naturalistic Enquiry* (SAGE)

Madill, A., Jordan, A., Shirley, C. (2000) Objectivity and reliability in qualitative analysis: Realist, contextualist and radical constructionist epistemologies, *British Journal of Psychology* (91:1)

May, K A. (1996) Diffusion, diffusion or distillation? The case of grounded theory method, *Qualitative Health Research* (6)

McLafferty, S. (1995) Counting for women, *Professional Geographer* (47)

Melia, K M. (1996) Rediscovering Glaser, *Qualitative Health Research* (6)

Moralli, M. (2024) Research as care: Positionality and reflexivity in qualitative migration research, *Qualitative Research* (24:3)

Morse, J M. (2006) The politics of developing research methods, *Qualitative Health Research* (16:1)

Morse, J M., Field, P A. (1995) *Qualitative Research Methods for Health Professionals* (SAGE)

Mountz, A., Bonds, A., Mansfield, B., Loyd, J., Hyndman, J., Walton-Roberts, M., Basu, R., Whitson, R., Hawkins, R., Hamilton, T., Curran, W. (2015) For slow scholarship: a feminist politics of resistance through collective action in the neoliberal university. *ACME* (14:4)

Nast, H. (1994) The Politics of Knowing and the Political/Empiricist Emphasis in Feminist Geography, *Professional Geographer* (46)

Nathaniel, A. (2006) Thoughts on the Literature Review and GT, *Grounded Theory Review* (5:2-3)

Nye, C., Wheeler, R. (2023) 'I've got nothing against vegans…but': To divulge, dissemble of divert positionality in rural research settings, *Food Ethics* (8:19)

Parak, F. Poursaeed, A., Eshraghi-Samani, R., Chaharsoughi-Amin, H. (2022) Designing a Model via Grounded Theory to Reduce Agricultural Work Injury among Orchardists in Ilam Province, *Journal of Agromedicine* (27:2)

Räty, N., Tuomisto, H., Ryynänen, T. (2023) On what basis is it agriculture?: A qualitative study of farmers' perceptions of agriculture, *Technological Forecasting and Social Change* (196)

Reed, I A. (2012) Cultural Sociology as Research Program: Post-Positivism, Meaning, and Causality, in, Alexander, J C., Jacobs, R N., Smith, P. (eds.) *The Oxford Handbook of Cultural Sociology* (Oxford University Press)

Riley, M. (2005) Silent meadows: The uncertain decline and conservation of hay meadows in the British landscape, *Landscape Research* (30:4)

Riley, M. (2006) Reconsidering conceptualisations of farm conservation activity: The case of conserving hay meadows, *Journal of Rural Studies* (22)

Riley, M. (2014) Interviewing fathers and sons together: Exploring the potential of joint interviews for research on family farms, *Journal of Rural Studies* (36)

Riley, M. (2016) How does longer term participation in agri-environment schemes [re]shape farmers' environmental dispositions and identities? *Land Use Policy* (52)

Riley, M., Turner, J., Hayes, S., Peters, K. (2021) Mobile Interviews by Land, Air and Sea, in, von Benzon, N., Holton, M., Wilkinson, C., Wilkinson, S. (eds.) *Creative Methods for Human Geographers* (Sage)

Rose, G. (1997) Situating knowledges: positionality, reflexivities and other tactics, *Progress in Human Geography* (21:3)

Sebastian, K. (2019) Distinguishing between the strains of grounded theory: classical, interpretive and constructivist, *Journal for Social Thought* (3)

Stern, P N. (1994) Eroding grounded theory, in, Morse, J M. (ed.) *Critical Issues in Qualitative Research Methods* (SAGE)

Stern, P N., Allen, L., Moxley, P. (1982) The nurse as a grounded theorist: history, process and uses, *Review Journal of Philosophy and Social Science* (7)

Strauss, A L., Corbin, J M. (1998) *Basics of qualitative research: Techniques and procedures for developing grounded theory* (SAGE)

Sutherland, L-A. (2010) Environmental grants and regulations in strategic farm business decision-making: A case study of attitude behaviour in Scotland, *Land Use Policy* (27)

Von Benzon, N. (2023) Human Geography and Creative Methods: Moving and Mapping, in, Kara, H. (ed.) *The Bloomsbury Handbook of Creative Research Methods* (Bloomsbury)

Wilson, G. (2008) From ‘weak’ to ‘strong’ multifunctionality: conceptualising farm-level multifunctional transition pathways, *Journal of Rural Studies* (24)

Chapter 4: Making sense of meaning, making meaning of sense: Re-centring care in research

As we sat on Reflexivity Hill together in Chapter 2, I told you about relationality and the implications this had on my research practice. Throughout that walk, the importance of 'grounded' accounts for understanding and shaping macro-level dynamics was discussed. We saw this with the critique levelled at 'post-productivism' (Wilson, 2001), with the omission of such accounts in policy perspectives (Brown et al., 2021) and private governance (Konefal et al., 2005). More holistic approaches to farming practice which took culture into account were found to be illuminating for understanding resistance to and/or uptake of agri-environmental schemes (Burton et al., 2008; Riley, 2016; Cusworth and Dodsworth, 2021). Finally, care ethics literature foregrounded the importance of experiential knowledge for 'good care' (Krzywoszynska, 2016). This paper presents how embodied, lived experience shapes research practice. It contributes to literature on the politics of knowledge, adding a 'fleshed out' example of the role of emotion within knowledge production (Moralli, 2024). It also adds to literature that specifically examines the value of 'lived experience' perspectives within the mental health sphere (Toikko, 2016). What follows is an original argument on how emotional repression can culminate in intellectual isolation and extractivist research practice. This acts to further reinforce this thesis' justification for centring lived experience and integrating grounded theory into the methodology. This paper also connects literature on care ethics to the therapeutic modality of Democratic Therapeutic Communities for the first time.

A term I will have used a few times so far and which appears in the following paper is 'phenomenology', which may need some quick explanation. To borrow from Bakewell, phenomenology can be best boiled down to "DESCRIBE PHENOMENA" (2016: 51, original capitalisation). The book I have just cited is one of the best philosophy books I have ever read – it is part autobiography and part introduction to the various strands of existentialist philosophy. To paraphrase the author, I think this book is particularly good because philosophy could often do with a bit more life to it, and life could often do with a bit more philosophy to it (2016: 43). Phenomenology is philosophy's attempt at bridging these two worlds.

In response to more positivist rationale, phenomenology is a method of description, developed with the aim of equipping philosophers with the tools to describe human

experience (Buttimer, 1976: 278). Within geography, this means research that queries the "significance of people's inescapable immersion in a geographical world" (Seamon, 1980: 148). This paper is an account of such immersion.

What follows is a version of what was published in *Emotion, Space and Society* in 2025. The only changes I have made are grammatical, such as capitalising 'Indigenous', which I should have done originally (Weeber, 2020). I have so far given you a transparent account of how this research was designed and then redesigned. This paper gives you information about how this PhD was experienced, especially the fieldwork aspect, connecting the changes made to the research design discussed prior to this. It is another attempt to pull back the curtain a little on the research process (Gilbert, 1994: 90).

References

Bakewell, S. (2016) *At the Existentialist Café: Freedom, Being, and Apricot Cocktails* (Other Press)

Brown, C., Kovács, E., Herzon, I., Villamayor-Tomas, S., Albizua, A., Galanaki, A., Grammatikopoulou, I., McCracken, D., Alkan Olsson, J., Zinnegrebe, Y. (2011) Simplistic understandings of farmer motivations could undermine the environmental potential of the common agricultural policy, *Land Use Policy* (101)

Burton, R J F., Kuczera, C., Schwarz, G. (2008) Exploring farmers' cultural resistance to voluntary agri-environmental schemes, *Sociologia Ruralis* (48)

Buttimer, A. (1976) Grasping the dynamism of the lifeworld, *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* (66:2)

Cusworth G., Dodsworth, J. (2021) Using the 'good farmer' concept to explore agricultural attitudes to the provision of public goods. A case study of participants in an English agri-environmental scheme, *Agriculture and Human Values* (38)

Gilbert, M R. (1994) The politics of location: doing feminist research 'at home', *Professional Geographer* (46)

Konefal, J., Mascarenhas, M., Hatanaka, M. (2005) Governance in the global agro-food system: Backlighting the role of transnational supermarket chains, *Agriculture and Human Values* (22)

Krzywoszynska, A. (2016) What farmers know: Experiential knowledge and care in vine growing, *Sociologia Ruralis* (56:2)

Moralli, M. (2024) Research as care: Positionality and reflexivity in qualitative migration research, *Qualitative Research* (24:3)

Riley, M. (2016) How does longer term participation in agri-environment schemes [re]shape farmers' environmental dispositions and identities? *Land Use Policy* (52)

Seamon, D. (1980) Body-subject, time-space routines, and place-ballets, in, Buttimer, A., Seamon, D. (eds.) *The Human Experience of Space and Place* (Croom Helm)

Toikko, T. (2016) Becoming an expert by lived experience: an analysis of service users' learning process, *Social Work in Mental Health* (14:3)

Weeber, C. (2020) Why Capitalise "Indigenous"? *Sapiens*, https://www.sapiens.org/language/capitalize-indigenous/ Accessed 15/3/26

Wilson, G A. (2001) From productivism to post-productivism…and Back Again? Exploring the (Un)changed Nature and Mental Landscapes of European Agriculture, *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* (26:1)

Making sense of meaning, making meaning of sense: Re-centring care in research

Abstract: Utilising narrative form and ethnographic method, this paper is a reflexive plea for an academic community which foregrounds care and relationality. Contributing to literature on the politics of knowledge and continuing the pre-existing metaphor of knowledge-as-vision, I argue for a more unified, binocular gaze which draws just as much on meaning as it does on sense. The evidence for this argument stems from phenomenological reflection on my experiences and positionality within research settings, in the field, and as both a mental health patient and practitioner. This paper is a methodological account which aims to embrace the messy complexities of research and draws on a wide range of literature, principally, feminist care ethics, relational ontologies, philosophies of science and knowledge production, and democratic therapeutic communities. Ultimately, I outline how a neoliberal and production-orientated academy encourages a dangerous level of emotional repression and disavowal of meaning, harming a multiplicity of actors.

Published in *Emotion, Space and Society* (56) https://doi.org/10.1016/j.emospa.2025.101096

Key words: Care ethics, Relationality, Reflexivity, Positionality, Knowledge production, Lived experience

1. Introduction

Drawing on academic literature and personal experience, this paper acts as a reflexive plea for an academic community which is more grounded in care and relational perspectives. Inspired by my own experiences within interdisciplinary settings, this paper contributes to discussions on the politics of knowledge creation, acquisition, and dissemination. Continuing the pre-existing metaphor of knowledge-as-vision (Haraway, 1988), I argue for a more unified, binocular gaze which draws just as much on meaning, as it does on sense.

Traditional academic papers base their communication in rationality, adopting what Bruner (2009) calls a paradigmatic mode of written communication. My focus for this paper is to prioritise the communication of meaning, through transformational emotional experience (Ibid.). For this reason, I utilize narrative form (Cross, 2009; Cameron, 2012). I use Bruner's literary theories about narrative to share the story of my research process in a way that, unlike paradigmatic writing, foregrounds meaning making and relationships, and how these change personal phenomenological experience. My aim is that this approach flattens the power

dynamics of academia and represents the transformative potential of emotional relations for understanding the social; making a new theoretical contribution to theories of knowledge (Couper, 2024; Meloni, 2020; Holland, 2007). In writing this way, I also encourage the reader to turn their backs on the "stupefying modern obsession with productivity" (Mountz et al., 2015: 1246) and, instead of skimming, to read this paper slowly, at least in principle (Ibid.).

The initial drafts for this paper came from attempts to write up my PhD thesis methodology section. I found that when writing up the methodology, it is all too easy to end up lying by omission, cutting out large chunks of methodological honesty (Davies et al., 2021; Hampton, 1995). These kinds of lies are easy, but they are easy in the same way that it is easy to hide tattoos from grandparents, or not tell someone they have food in their teeth. That is, easy in a way that leaves you with an uneasy feeling, a node of emotional morality (Goralnik et al., 2014: 5; Moralli, 2023). Prompted by this uneasy feeling, and in what was intended to be a private exercise in creative writing, I decided to write a more honest methodology. My plan was to take this private draft and use it as a carcass from which to pull a stock, dumping the personal elements into the food waste and presenting a "pure" methodology soup. If I paid attention to detail, I felt that I could sieve myself out and that no one would complain ("waiter! I think there's a person in this research!"). In the act of writing myself in, I found that I could not write myself out again, at least, not without also cutting away perspectives flavoured with positionality.

1.1. What Lies Ahead

This paper begins with a discussion on how I intend to use positionality as a theoretical tool to enable the reader to better engage with the content. I then attempt to introduce myself ('Section 2: Positionality, Place and the Point of it All') by discussing the place(s) I am from and the deep relational quality place can have with a person (Jones, 2015; Jadallah, 2024). Focusing on where I have been – Warwickshire, Manchester, Edinburgh – leads me to explain the initial motivation for my PhD; a care-full and emotional connection to the work of research (Hampton, 1995).

Arriving at the PhD destination in 'Section 3: Hunting for Data', I write about how my experience of interdisciplinary spaces left me feeling untethered and disconnected from any discipline at all. This feeling of intellectual isolation leads me to reflect on wider experiences of otherness, specifically my experience of mental health disorders. I describe how being framed as disordered by a scientific authority led me to perceive and present myself in a

certain way, suffocating the same feelings which once tied me to my work. I reflect on how this personal experience bled into my professional work, where I began to treat research with the same extractivist objectivity under which I also suffered.

In 'Section 4: To the Feelings Themselves!', I recollect my experiences of being the object of psychological science, concluding that therapeutic modalities which focus on finding and understanding meaning served me best, rather than those which attempted to project sense onto me. I discuss in detail my experience of Democratic Therapeutic Communities (DTC), a form of group therapy which I spent two years receiving and many more years delivering. By presenting the theoretical aspects of DTC work and my own lived experience, I foreground the importance of relationality and care, which leads me to cover wider academic literature on care (Tronto, 2015) and relational ontologies (Marin and Bang, 2018; Gould et al., 2023; Wilson, 2008).

Returning once more to my research, 'Section 5: It takes a village (to make me do a pilot interview)' tells of how afraid I was to begin my fieldwork and that it was my place-based positionality which moved me through this feeling of 'stuckness' with my work. Reflecting on a pilot interview, I present to the reader how the phenomenological experience of doing research worked as the antidote to an overdose of abstraction. This intensely relational experience allowed me to reconnect with the actual meaning of my work, reconnecting with it as something "living, breathing" (Hampton, 1995: 52). This is something explored in 'Section 6: Welcome Back', where I connect the dots on the significance of my fieldwork experience in foregrounding relationality in my emotional relationship to my work. Here I expand more on my experience working within the mental health sphere as a 'Service User Consultant' or 'Lived Experience Practitioner', spotlighting the value of experiential knowledge. I draw connections between this work and my fieldwork, showcasing the importance of upending traditional knowledge flows.

Having retraced the steps of my research journey, 'Section 7: Reconciling with Care' works to reflexively point out the importance of care in both my personal and professional journey. Looking back at my experience, I can retrospectively see how this neoliberal landscape makes caring, about ourselves, our research, and each other, more difficult (Mountz et al., 2015). I write about how my experiences encouraged me to frame sense and meaning as two opposite and conflicting ways of interpreting the world. In contrast, I consider that sense and meaning are more akin to two eyes, in that regardless of where we stand individually in the

landscape of power, as a community, we see better with both (Rose, 1997). Building on this metaphor, I conclude by arguing that academia's increasingly monocular vision makes for a dangerous way of moving through the world, lacking in meaningful coordination.

2. Positionality, Place, and the Point of it All

A core theme of this paper is positionality and methodological humility (Narayan, 1988), where I attempt to present aspects of myself that will have shaped how my data was sought, created and interpreted (Folkes, 2023). There is a certain irony that an attempt at such humility can easily slip into self-indulgent narcissism (Delamont, 2009). My reasoning for writing ethnographically is to portray my positionality as closer to its fluid, ever-changing nature (Rose, 1997; Folkes, 2023). It is also to avoid discussing positionality in a way that is performative (Macfarlane, 2021) akin to, as Folkes has described, a "shopping list" (2023). Who I am and the visible and invisible tools (Reyes, 2020) available to me are scattered throughout this article, as they were in the actual research process. The positionality presented is phenomenological in nature, in that I am focusing on my lived experience of things, as they meant to me at the time of encounter (Cameron, 2012). My goal is to recant one "[wo]man's geographical experiences as they are "actually" experienced – as meaningful, value-laden experience prior to the abstraction of science" (Entrikin, 1976: 629). I cannot perform a god-trick and describe these events to you in a purely objective way (Haraway, 1988). Nor can I perform a goddess trick, and present my subjectivity in a holistic, total manner (Rose, 1997). I suppose then, I shall simply have to stop trying to trick you. I have attempted to leave out that which contains no "analytical mileage" (Delamont, 2009), whilst still painting a picture full of flesh (Merleau-Ponty, 1969; Lakoff and Johnson, 1999), just as messy and complex as the research itself (Law, 2004). All of this is, to some extent, an impossible task, but there are still meanings to be found in the means, and I think that's the point in the end.

A great deal of this paper draws on literature which orientates itself around relational ontologies, problematising conceptual boundaries. Besides Moore's writing interrogating the nature/society division (Moore, 2015), my initial exposure to this ontology came through literature on Land (Styres and Zinga, 2013). So far, this conceptualisation is the best description I have come across to describe my relationship with my home Land. Stemming from Indigenous Canadian perspectives, in this conception, land, when written with a lower-case L, refers to the more geological understanding of the word, whereas Land, when

capitalised, refers to something beyond the material (Styres and Zinga, 2013: 301). The notion of Land is as something inherently relational and spiritual (Haig-Brown and Hodson, 2009). In this instance, the understanding of spirituality is more grounded in meaning, in what it means to the reader, rather than abstracted into sense, in what it means to someone, or something, else (Cascio, 1998).

I grew up in a small, rural village in the Midlands, where meals were frequently communal and the seasons well-marked with events, both religious and otherwise. If a village resident was prone to wandering and turning up on doorsteps, they were usually invited in – be they child, elderly person, or Ollie the Golden Retriever (who lived up to his name, as he did require a lot of retrieving). During my tumultuous teenage years, I would go to the land. Access to nature was unobstructed and the surrounding land was a space "outside of adult rule" (Hayes, 2021: 22). My mother briefly moved away and was immediately itching to return, saying to me, "I just feel held by the land". I deeply understood.

I left at 18, to Manchester, and later spent two years in Edinburgh, before returning to Manchester once again. It is hard, to leave a place you love, and I have loved all of these places. Owain Jones reflected that one may find his childhood farm in his very DNA (2015: 14). Similarly, I feel there is some substance of myself which I have left in these places, in exchange for my time there. A part of my heart is buried in the dirt in rural Warwickshire, another piece in Manchester, trodden into the pavement like chewing gum. In Edinburgh, you will find a piece of me wedged in the ugly pebbledash of a beautiful cul-de-sac. Every time I move away, I feel the tearing of myself. I think I cannot go and I hope I never put down roots again. I think that, surely, I cannot break off another piece of my heart like hard candy and let its stickiness collect the dust and dirt of other places. I think there is no more left of me to give, no more whole from which to snap a half. Yet, I reach into my pocket for that thing of sweetness, and I find that it has grown, fed by all the places I have loved before.

When I left Warwickshire, it was to study for an undergraduate degree in Politics and International Relations and around halfway through this course, I started to intentionally specialise in Environmental Politics. As this paper shall explore, my academic journey has landed me somewhere in the realm of human geography, but I retain a great fondness for the politics discipline. Like my childhood village, my home discipline is much more to me than a theoretical landscape. I was taught, and most importantly cared for, by people who showed me that, to some extent, village is a state of mind. That, even if you have moved to the city,

you will always need a village. In my final year, I vocalised for the first time to my dissertation supervisor that I wanted to do a PhD, and that I wanted to understand "why I care so much and other people don't"[7]. I then worked very hard to do two things: secure the PhD position and forget about this emotional motivation altogether.

3. Hunting for Data

I succeeded in getting onto a Doctoral Training Programme, one aimed at linking the material and social worlds. Through my research, I aimed to understand individual farmers' perspectives on their industry and the policies that governed it – why they farmed despite an increasingly difficult economic climate. I wanted to know their hopes and fears for the future. I wanted to know why they did what they did. I was hoping they wouldn't ask me the same question. Like any sense-able student, I followed the packet instructions and completed a dry and uninspired literature review. This covered the productivism to post-productivism shift in UK agricultural practice, where the drive to produce at all costs which was cemented during World War Two supposedly adjusted to allow for more economically flexible and environmentally friendly farming practices (Muirhead and Almås, 2012). This review also covered the associated critiques within this body of literature, namely how the logic of productivism remains dominant in on-the-ground farming practice (Wilson, 2001a). Re-reading these texts now, I realise my reactions to them were, mostly, projections of my own mental state as someone living in the city of Environmental Science but completely lacking in a village. As an intellectually lonely student of the social, I longed for something human, something warm, the textual equivalent of skin-to-skin (Hampton, 1995: 49). The literature review, my purpose as a PhD student, all made sense to me, but I struggled to understand what any of it really meant.

I have had many meaningful conversations with material scientists who have become friends, but I must say that, at least at the start of this interdisciplinary journey, I kept putting my foot in it. I kept being invited to talk about my research and then being told I was going off topic. I kept finding myself wheeled into rooms to perform a magic trick; make the messy world of the social fit around the sharp corners of science (Griffiths, 2022). I would leave conference rooms feeling like I had just suggested a six-week course of antibiotics as a solution to conflict in the Middle East. I was reminded of being back in school, with everyone speaking

[7] This is a direct quote from me at 20, and so it doesn't accurately reflect my current understandings of care, which are more complex, less judgemental and less self-aggrandising!

the language of sense, whilst I lagged behind desperately trying to translate the words into meaning (Bruce, 2023). Time and time again I found myself having to do the impossible; tell us what you think, but don't tell us what you feel.

If I am honest, I find it very hard to talk about sense-based science without accidentally disclosing how I feel about it, the feelings seeping out into the words I write and clattering around the keyboard like a scowling teenager. Part of the reason for this is that, from a clinical science perspective, I am a disordered specimen; recurrent depressive disorder, generalised anxiety disorder, borderline personality disorder, complex and standard post-traumatic stress disorder, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder. Whilst I can see the sense in these disordered conclusions, the meaning hurts (Watts, 2024) and the meaning sticks with me, even if the sense does not.

Pushing these feelings down was something I thought I had become used to, having been the object of psychological science for a long time. Following an initial episode of manic suicidality which culminated in some of the above diagnoses and a pet dog, I had decided to work with the science, to swallow my pride with my quetiapine. I took it upon myself to organise my clinical disorder and studied therapy just as hard as I studied Politics. I did intensive courses, intensive therapies, intensive journalling. I took all the medication prescribed, even when the psychiatrist disclosed which ones she had shares in, which was by far the most shocking part of being sectioned (Cosgrove et al., 2023). I forced myself to fit around the sharp corners of psychological science, and when the corners cut into me, I apologised for bleeding and blamed myself for being made of flesh.

Having committed myself to being science's sensible subject in my personal life, I found myself clumsily following its godlike commands in my professional life too. Hence why I found myself tainting the sense-based landscapes of Environmental Science (Waring, 2022). I was a stranger from Politics who could not go home, and I was waiting for someone to discover the real me who, I felt, was the intellectual equivalent of three children in a lab coat who has snuck in through a side door. I was waiting for someone to shout "SURPRISE" and ask me for my favourite soil type, and then point and laugh as I tried to regurgitate a recently digested textbook. I was also afraid of being discovered as a woman with a past (Heineman, 2019). I didn't flat out avoid talking about my mental health issues, but I framed them as a previous endeavour, something overcome and beneficial for the diversity tickbox (Koskinen, 2022). "Madness? Oh I think I went to school with her, we've not spoken in years," I would

say, as if the day before I had not laid face down in my garden, naked and sobbing into the dirt. As the PhD progressed, so this denial became a subconscious activity, as I perfected methods of inconspicuous self-harm that fooled even me. I find that discussions around mental health are frequently framed as something which could be fodder for a motivational YouTube video, something which actually makes you more employable. From my experience, being honest about my experience of mental illness is just as often embarrassing and humiliating (Parkinson, 2018). To compromise, I frame things in a digestible way, tell a partial truth, disclose the palatable diagnoses, am lightly self-deprecating and apologise for being made of flesh. Just as one must pretend to be a scientist in order to talk about science (Latour, 1999: 17), I find that when talking about insanity, it helps to pretend that you are sane. Dressing in this dual disguise to everyone around me, I began to go out hunting for my data.

In the children's film How to Train Your Dragon (DeBlois and Sanders, 2010), it is discovered that the dragons have been stealing sheep not for their own sustenance, but due to being mind-controlled by an evil Alpha dragon. There's a scene where a particularly pathetic breed of dragon – a Gronckle – regurgitates a small fish into the mouth of the Alpha dragon, and is promptly eaten whole as punishment for such an inadequate offering. Whenever I reflect back on how I felt during this time in my research, this is the analogy that always pops into my head. I was out hunting for data to puke into the mouth of Academic Science, and I was becoming increasingly aware that I might get eaten for not providing something good enough (Rikap and Harari-Kermadec, 2020; Campbell et al., 2024). At supervision meetings, I was a chef being asked to present a tasting menu of innovative and insightful theories. Instead, I was throwing up stomach bile onto a plate, apologising for the presence of my own DNA and semi-digested feelings, before smearing everything around with my fingers, trying to imitate the artistic patterns restaurants do with sauces.

Seeking fodder to later vomit onto a plate, I attended a series of agricultural shows. These expeditions became increasingly stale and repetitive, featuring the same stalls selling the same things, despite the advertisement of "local" products. A common feature of these shows was a woman selling pinned insects: butterflies, moths, bugs in wooden frames. When I asked her about them, she told me she got them from a wholesaler "over there" in Africa and could give me no more information. Somewhere along the supply chain, these creatures had lost their stories because no one had asked. Similarly so, without my feelings, my stories, my meanings, my work felt as dead and empty as this untethered taxidermy.

4. To the Feelings Themselves!

Reflecting on my time as the obedient object of various mental health treatments, I feel that most would help a little, but always the same dark fog would return, a panicked wave of emotions threatening to pull me under but never fully drown me. I can split what mental health treatments I have received into two camps: those that try to make sense out of mental disorder, and those that work with the meanings that said (dis)order spells out (Bruce, 2023). Of the sense variety; medications, cognitive behavioural therapy, dialectical behavioural therapy, and various 'person-centred' talking therapies whose names I forget. I find their ultimate inefficacy unsurprising, given that they attempted to reason with my emotions and mental processes; it is hard to reason yourself out of a place that you did not reason yourself into. I knew it was not reasonable to believe I *had* to kill myself (even if I did not *want* to), or to think I had a secret brain tumour, or that the people in the hospital beds around me were secretly dolls. No amount of rationality took away the fact that I still felt these things were true, even if I knew they were not. Reason and sense are blunt tools against the water of a mind.

Of course, I would not be writing this paper now if I had not found some therapeutic modalities helpful. Generally speaking, approaches that work with meaning were more successful, and I found EMDR (Eye Movement Desensitisation and Reprocessing) and DTC group therapy particularly so. Formally speaking, EMDR involves "recalling [a] traumatic incident in detail while making eye movements, usually by following the movement of your therapist's finger" (NHS, n.d.a). For myself, this looked like holding two devices in each hand, which would buzz in succession, whilst recanting various life events with my eyes closed. A firm but compassionate woman would talk me through the process, asking me where and how things felt in my body, what was coming up and instructing me to "just notice". Don't fix. Don't explain. Don't analyse. Just notice. I had to learn how to listen to my emotions, sit with them and not try to apply sense-based plasters to them in the hopes they'd fade away. I found that when I stopped trying so hard to fix things all the time, I was finally able to look at them. So much time had been spent analysing behaviours, thought processes, medication dosage, but this approach brushed all that aside. It was more phenomenological in nature, shifting the focus from the abstract and turning, maybe not directly "to the things themselves!" (Bakewell, 2016) as phenomenologists famously say, but certainly to the feelings themselves. The feelings, the flesh, the body, all relationally understood.

Alongside EMDR, I attended a DTC for two years. This is a form of group therapy with a focus on interdependency and relationships (Pearce and Haigh, 2017). DTCs aim "to create a culture of enquiry, to explore all behaviours, thoughts and emotions…empowering you to take responsibility for yourself and each other." (NHS, n.d.b). Note the order of this explanation; first, you have to explore how you feel, then, you work with how you feel. You can't work with what you do not understand. Theoretically, DTC work is deeply informed by Foulkes' work on group dynamics, which is premised on the theory that groups like DTCs reflect wider society (Lees et al., 2017: 89) and thus members, consciously and unconsciously, reinforce norms and "correct each other's neurotic reactions" (Foulkes, 1983: 29). Staff members are present in DTCs, and will step in if needed, but largely speaking groups are run by and for the members themselves. In essence, the group as a whole comes to "constitute the very Norm, from which, individually, they deviate" (Ibid). Practically speaking, DTCs don't look that different to an Alcoholics Anonymous meeting, except rules around attendance are more strict, and rules around substance use less so. Attendance and commitment rules, alongside general group dynamics, work to reinforce the importance of belonging which, for many members, is an alien feeling (Pearce and Pickard, 2012).

I could say more on the DTC theoretical framework (Lees et al., 2019; Pearce and Haigh, 2017) but for the purposes of this story, I would be slipping too much into sense, and losing the meaning. From my experience, one of the joys of DTC work is its distance from cold, hard theory. In essence, I find that being part of a DTC teaches members how to love those they do not like, and to care about them in the process. To follow Foulkes' work, I suppose it could be said that the care I had for others outside of myself worked against the feeling I had towards myself. When I engaged with others as my equals, and the social world in which we healed (or did not heal) was something we made together, I found that care was catching.

There is, of course, theoretical literature on care. I know now that there are whole areas of the social sciences which discuss emotion (Mannay, 2018) and care (Engster and Hamington, 2015). However, my first encounter with care in academic literature came subtly, hidden in an undergraduate reading of Carol Cohn's "Sex and Death in the Rational World of Defence Intellectuals" (Cohn, 1987). This is an autoethnographic discourse analysis about the logic of nuclear defence intellectuals. Reflecting on her time with her participants, Cohn writes, "Reader, I liked them" (1987: 690). Her parodying of Brontë's, "Reader, I married him" (Brontë, 1848: 463) made me burst out laughing. It also made me want to cry, for reasons unclear to me at the time. I wrote in my notes that Cohn was "befriending the reader". The

reality was that this was the first academic text that had reached out through the pages and reminded me what any of this means. That this research was about life, about one human (the author) talking to another (the reader) about other people (the research participants). In the context of nuclear war, this only makes the piece more sobering. Two years into my undergraduate degree, I had just been reminded why I chose to study Politics in the first place; care.

The literature on care differentiates its philosophical roots from that of traditional ethics, which starts with an agent-centred individual approach and delves into a very sense-based logic to determine what is morally correct (Goralnik et al., 2014: 8; Frankfurt, 1982). Just like sense-based mental health treatments, this mode of thinking has its place in the world but ethics, like cognitive behavioural therapy, lacks, at times, in its ability to transfer to the messy and meaning-full reality of life (Tronto, 2015: 265). Much like the DTC model, care ethics begins from a relational perspective (Groenhout, 2004; Koggel, 1998). Rather than attempt to reason with or reason away the existence of emotions, care ethics sees them as integral and even, at times, a source of moral guidance (Goralnik et al., 2014: 5). There is a phenomenological aspect to these understandings of theory and practice, reinforcing the understanding that "life becomes ideas and ideas return to life" (Merleau-Ponty, 1968: 119).

This body of literature grounds itself in relationality, arguing that the relationship must be the epistemological starting point (Tronto, 2015: 265). I find Indigenous philosophy particularly persuasive at arguing for this perspective, holding a wider view of relationality as something inherent. Relationality is not just epistemological, but also ontological and axiological (Marin and Bang, 2018). Further still, the very concepts of ontology, epistemology, methodology, and axiology are relational and inseparable from each other, all parts of the same circle (Wilson, 2008: 70). Everything is cyclical, connected, interdependent. This "ontological turn" has now been picked up by Western scholars, but its roots run deep in Indigenous groups (Todd, 2016). Indeed, much like my experience with group therapy showed me, it is not simply that we are in relationship with others, but rather that we are the relationship itself (Wilson, 2001b).

5. It Takes a Village (to make me do a pilot interview)

Prior to beginning my fieldwork, I returned to Land to visit friends and family. I had not yet secured any interviews for my research, although I had not tried particularly hard. I was beginning to dread the fieldwork and dragged my feet in the process. I was trying my best not

to present as the human equivalent of an exhausted Gronckle and so I generally shied away from discussing my thesis. This was a red flag to anyone who knew me, because I never shy away from talking (about anything). An uncle figure had picked up on my stagnation and pulled me aside one day, announcing, “I’ve got you an interview”.

Jim, a talented engineer and locomotive enthusiast, knew the local farmers well. He often drove the combine during harvesting, and provided the steam engine used to power the scratter (a repurposed leaf blower) for the annual cider making. On my behalf, Jim had spoken to a local farmer and arranged for me to talk to him. “Good to talk to someone your own age,” he said wisely, when he told me of his handiwork. Ben (pseudonym) was the son of a local farming family, in his 30s, and had been in my peripheral vision my whole life. One morning at 8am, Jim’s wife, Hazel, and I walked up towards Ben’s house together. I was anxious and afraid – of asking the wrong questions, of saying the wrong thing, of being uncovered as made of flesh.

“Do you want me to come in with you?” Hazel asked.

“No, it’s ok. I think I’d rather do it alone,” I answered. I wanted to embarrass myself in front of as few people as possible.

I sat in Ben’s kitchen in a small cottage. The French doors were open and the view stretched out over fields of spring oats onto rolling hills and trees. The sun was out. We talked about our common ground, literally. We talked about the land we both loved. We knew this land for the dens we had made growing up, the people that lived there, the churches our mothers visited. He also knew it as a patchwork of soil types; the red soil over on the rented land, the heavy clay where we sat now. When he talked about the clay, he gestured with his hands, like there was a ball of it weighing heavy in his palms. When he talked about the lighter soil, I could see it running through his fingers like sand. I felt an overwhelming sense of compersion, the opposite of jealousy (Brunning, 2020). Compersion, the phrase used in non-monogamous circles for the joy you find in others joy, for how you can love to watch your partner love someone else. I loved the way he loved his land, my land, our Land.

Somewhere along the (supply) chain of books, shows and conferences, I had started thinking like the butterfly merchant, like the dragon. I had been so intimidated by the sense around me, by the scientists and their methods and standing in the world (Held, 2023; Mellor, 2003: 512) that I was afraid they would eat me if I brought back data which was not sense flavoured. I had found myself perpetuating the very same subordination that I had felt so

stung by (Mäki et al., 2018). So focused on sense, on impressing the scientists, I had forgotten the farmers, I had forgotten Land. I had forgotten to ask them to tell me their stories. I had forgotten the importance of slowing down, sitting and just noticing (Mountz et al., 2015).

When you repeat the same word over and over again, it starts to sound alien and strange because you have thought about it so much. A similar thing had occurred here; I had spent so long squinting at abstracted pictures of the world that they had started to appear distant and alien. Lacking in meaning, the sense became nonsensical. Again, the phenomenological approach sweeps in to remind me that I am also in the picture, standing in the same world I am researching. The scientific approach has long shied away from this reality, fearing that if researchers were also in the world they were studying, they would muddy up the objectivity (Harding, 2015). Of course, all of this forgets that it is only by being in the world, with all our muddy footprints on objectivity's white carpet, that we are able to communicate and study it in the first place (Merleau-Ponty, 2012: 482).

Following this pilot interview, I went from struggling to start, to struggling to stop. I completed 41 interviews in total, roaming across England in my bashed-up Skoda, throwing myself on the doorsteps of farmers who had answered my emails, letters, and phone calls. I had spent a year wandering around the building of the farming community, trying to think of expert and novel ways to break in like a burglar. In my attempt to be a scientist, I had forgotten to be a person. If I wanted "in", all I had to do was ask. It is also worth noting here that, in general, getting "in" is easy for me, providing I don't get in my own way. I am a 5'2" white woman with institutional backing, considerable social capital and an RP accent (Received Pronunciation, or "Right Posh" for clarity). I am sure these visible and invisible tools work against me in some settings, but to generalise, they open more doors than they close (Folkes, 2023; Reyes, 2020). If the doors to me felt closed at first, it was because I was lacking in the courage to knock. Who knows how long I would have stood there on the doorstep, drafting and redrafting the same literature review, had it not been for that caring childhood figure, knocking with me.

6. Welcome Back

I have been told that when you become fluent in another language, it is not necessarily something you notice right away. Rather, in some benign moment, you realise your fluency mid-conversation. Midway through my fieldwork, I had such a moment whilst walking the

dog. I realised I was becoming increasingly fluent in the language of farmland. I was reading the fields. I could read the fields in photo negative, if I wanted, shifting my view from a patchwork of crops and grazing to an inverted crisscross of connecting hedgerows, wildlife's spaghetti junction. Before I had realised I was doing it, my eyes had registered which cow pats had been feasted on by birds, thus breaking the parasite life cycle. My dog was delighted that I had finally started expressing interest in his favourite topic – shit.

The things I was noticing, I could have learned, in theory, from a book. But I had spent the whole first year of my PhD trying to drag myself through academic articles on agriplastics, fertiliser uses and policy implementation. When I look back at myself in school, struggling my way through extra lessons on how to make sense of things, I realise now that I wasn't stupid, or lazy, but rather bored and disconnected. I feel the same now, looking back at myself in my first year of my PhD – "YOU DON'T HAVE WORK INDUCED NARCOLEPSY" I want to shout through time, "YOU'RE UNINSPIRED AND INTELLECTUALLY LONELY". As someone whose mind runs on meaning, it is clear to me now that sense just does not fuel me the same way it does others.

Whilst I have not been religious for many years now, when I think of the effect my fieldwork had on me, I am reminded of a Bible verse which a dear friend had at their wedding: "We love because he first loved us" (New International Version, 1984: 1 John: 14). It reminds me of my parents, it reminds me of my villages, it reminds me of the Land. It reminds me that care, like love, is learned relationally (Barkaskas and Gladwin, 2021). I had been trying to understand farming in a way completely disconnected from any meaning, from any relationships, from reality (Halle-Erby, 2024). I knew I would learn a lot from farmers, but I did not anticipate this reawakening. I thought I would be the one making sense of farmers, but I found instead that they were making meaning out of me.

Just as you cannot learn fully about phenomenology by reading phenomenological literature (Renaudie, 2020), here are just some of the moments from my fieldwork which I never could have found in a book:

- The farmer who plucks what looks like clover from his grassland, and instructs you to eat it, laughing at your surprise that it tastes like salad (because it is salad).
- The semi-retired patriarch of the cauliflower business, who explains through speech which has been garbled by a stroke how cauliflowers open with the moon. His son gifts you two cauliflowers and you eat one raw on the drive home.

- The gentleman and his Labrador who take you, in a battered up Landrover, to show you the woods where he wants his ashes to be scattered when he dies.

It was in these moments and more that my love for my studies returned. I walked home from that dog walk, where I had realised that I was reading the land. I went back to my desk, filled with a need to write that was in stark contrast to the lethargy of my first year. Opening my laptop, I had received an email from the farmer who I had interviewed that morning: "Thanks for popping in to see us today. I was very taken by your high level of enthusiasm. I think it is part of your character but obviously you are embracing your PhD project with alacrity". It might as well have read, "Welcome back."

Two years after I left my DTC, one of the staff members texted me to ask if I was interested in a therapeutic job; they were setting up a new group and wanted staff members with lived experience. I applied and was accepted. I helped run various groups which focused on intentional peer support, created co-produced communities, and trained to be psychiatrists on how to deal with individuals with "complex needs" (individuals like me). I now work in the same DTC I had once attended. The logic behind this increasing role is that service users are both sources of and producers of experiential knowledge (Toikko, 2016). More importantly, their experience works to unsettle the hegemonic discourse of mental health, which orbits around psychiatric and medical models (Cleary and Armour, 2022). It has been described as a bidirectional healing practice (Adame, 2014). I would say my field work was another kind of bidirectional healing, where the upending of the knowledge flow from academic to layperson (Wynne, 1996) and the centring of experiential knowledge, of lived experience, disrupted hegemonic discourses entrenched in traditional academia (Koskinen and Rolin, 2019).

7. Reconciling with Care

Much of the knowledge produced and reproduced, packaged and repackaged by the academy machine sells a view of the world which is solitary and Cartesian (Tynan and Bishop, 2019). The subject/object duality so present in the mainstream ontology (Heineman, 2019) has an epistemic knock-on effect (Mountz et al., 2015). In understanding knowledge, each other, the world, as separate, we start to act as such and, with the addition of a hypercompetitive neoliberal environment, we must pretend to be value-free (Harding, 2015). All of this makes reflexive discussions on positionality harder, given that vulnerability becomes something to be feared. Discussions of positionality, of the philosophy of science, of sense and meaning, end up recreating a scene like David and Goliath, where two polarised caricatures come forth

to battle. The “invisible conspiracy of masculinist scientists and philosophers with grants and laboratories” versus the “fetishized perfect subject” (Haraway, 1988: 575, 586).

How did it take me so many years to remember that I care about my work? Just as Carol Cohn took me by surprise by stating, “Reader, I liked them”, so I take myself by surprise by writing, Reader, I cared about them. I cared about the scientific researchers because we both want to understand the world, even if we struggled to understand each other. I cared about the farmers who I interviewed, because we both shared a deep love for the land. I cared in the same way I cared about my fellow DTC members; regardless of whether I liked them. I cared in a way that is imperfect, messy, full of feeling and reflective of the relational reality of life (Wilson, 2008). For me, care was the motive for my research, and that came well before my sense-based reasoning for doing so (Hampton, 1995).

When I stick with care, I realise that eating my research participants, flying them back to a cave and vomiting them into the mouth of Alpha Science is not very caring. This extractivist methodology views people as objects (Smith, 1992: 91) and treats them the same way a lot of mental health patients are treated; something to be “collected, analysed, made sense of, and authorized” (Spyrou, 2024: 5). When we work this way, whatever sense we make of our participants is unlikely to mean anything to them. If we continue to work to solely produce ever more of this sense-flavoured stuff then whatever we produce will mean nothing to us.

There are, of course, areas of academia which work to produce research filled with care and meaning. Where and what these areas are depends on who is asking. This is an account of the journey it has taken me to find these meaning-full pockets, and now that I have it is tempting to burrow deep within them and hiss at anyone who tries to talk sense to me. To do this would show that I have learned very little about relationality and care. Instead, I propose that sense and meaning, when they are working with and for each other, are better viewed as complementary. To continue the metaphor of vision used in similar discussions (Haraway, 1988), I suggest it helps to consider sense and meaning as akin to two eyes, in that, as humans, we do better with both. Our current vision is so obsessed with sense and so afraid of meaning that we are close to monocular, and so we are limited in the breadth and depth of what we can see. Not limited in the same way as subjectivity, where the best response is reflexive transparency about where we stand, what we are looking for, and any potential blind spots. Instead, we are limited in an avoidable manner, in that we are walking around with one eye closed because the sense eye does not like what the meaning eye has to see. Our lacking

proprioception means that we keep crashing into each other, into what we are researching, into ourselves, and then refusing to acknowledge that maybe it's because one of our eyes is shut. Given that we are made of flesh, we cannot cut away our meaning eye, lest we become a danger to ourselves and others (Hampton, 1995: 52). To behave like this would be to betray something we once cared deeply about. To betray what we care about, and for myself I mean to betray care itself, is not something with a sense-based immorality where we risk violating some agential-based philosophical duty of obligation (Groenhout, 2004). Instead, we violate something as precious and as meaningful as the baby in the bathwater; ourselves (Frankfurt, 1982).

8. Conclusion

This paper has aimed to create meaning and not just sense from my data (Held, 2023: 96). I have drawn on many types of data and areas of literature to make an argument for the centring of care-full relations and meaning-full knowledge within research communities. Research is a messy process, and my call for a more unified, binocular gaze stems from a desire to see the mess more clearly, more care-fully. To do this requires the work of multiple knowledges, multiple bodies, multiple meanings – to do this takes a village.

A final aim of this paper was to portray the messy reality of research but in a way that goes beyond the simplicity of "it's complicated". I often joke that my PhD is a baby born breech but healthy, because my process of understanding what I was actually researching came so late into the four year stint. Now I think about it, my understanding of breech, was breech. What kind of baby is born and immediately lands on its feet, walking around still attached to the placenta? Research comes into the world the same way most humans do; head-first, face down and screaming. Like babies, research is intended to be a living thing, and thus it must be something which is messy (Law, 2004). Like babies, research is intended to be cared about. The motives, the unquestioned answers which we swaddle in a disguise of unanswered questions to pass the funding application, are often the last thing we consciously understand (Wilson, 2008: 6). To drop, the penny must first be thrown. Do not mix up these metaphors and throw the baby. Take care of the baby, they have your eyes.

References

Adame, A L. (2014) "There Needs to be a Place in Society for Madness": The Psychiatric Survive Movement and New Directions in Mental Health Care, *Journal of Humanistic Psychology* (54:4)

Bakewell, S. (2016) *At the Existentialist Café: Freedom, Being, and Apricot Cocktails* (Other Press)

Barkaskas, P., Gladwin, D. (2021) Pedagogical Talking Circles: Decolonizing Education through Relational Indigenous Frameworks, *Journal of Teaching and Learning* (15:1)

Brontë, C. (1848) *Jane Eyre* (Alice and Books)

Bruce. L M J. (2023) Mad Black Rants, in, Mills, M., Sanchez, R. (eds.) *Crip Authorship: Disability as Method* (New York University Press)

Bruner, J. S. (2009) *Actual minds, possible worlds* (Harvard University Press)

Brunning, L. (2020) Compersion: An alternative to jealousy? *Journal of the American Philosophical Association* (6:2)

Cameron, E. (2012) New geographies of story and storytelling, *Progress in Human Geography* (35:5)

Campbell, S., Floristán Millán, E., Wolf, O., Thornton, R., Riva, S. (2024) Collective writing as survival tool: Mechanisms of reflexivity against neoliberal academia, *Emotion, Space and Society* (50)

Cascio, T. (1998) Incorporating Spirituality into Social Work Practice: A Review of What to Do, *Families in Society: The Journal of Contemporary Human Services* (79:5)

Cleary, R., Armour, C. (2022) Exploring the role of practitioner lived experience of mental health issues in counselling and psychotherapy, *Counselling and Psychotherapy Research* (22)

Cohn, C. (1987) Sex and death in the rational world of defense intellectuals, *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* (12:4)

Cosgrove, L., D'Ambrozio, G., Herrawi, F., Freeman, M., Shaughnessy, A. (2023) Why psychiatry needs an honest dose of gentle medicine, *Frontiers in Psychiatry* (14:1167910)

Couper, P. (2024) Feeling rules and emotion work in geomorphology fieldwork, *Environment and Planning F* (0:0)

Cross, B. (2009) Feeling my way into story space: Lessons for research from storyteller Duncan Williamson, *Emotion, Space and Society* (2:2)

Davies, T., Disney, T., Harrowell, E. (2021) Reclaiming failure in geography: Academic honesty in a neoliberal world, *Emotion, Space and Society* (38)

DeBlois, D., Sanders, C. (2010) *How to Train Your Dragon* (Paramount Pictures)

Delamont, S. (2009) The only honest thing: autoethnography, reflexivity and small crisis in fieldwork, *Ethnography and Education* (4:1)

Engster, D., Hamington, M. (2015) *Care Ethics and Political Theory* (Oxford University Press)

Entrikin, J N. (1976) Contemporary Humanism in Geography, *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* (66)

Folkes, L. (2023) Moving beyond 'shopping list' positionality: Using kitchen table reflexivity and in/visible tools to develop reflexive qualitative research, *Qualitative Research* (23:5)

Foulkes, S H. (1983) Introduction to Group Analytic Psychotherapy, *Studies in the Social Integration of Individuals and Groups* (Routledge)

Frankfurt, H. (1982) The Importance of What We Care About, *Synthese* (53:2)

Goralnik, L., Ferkany, M., Thorp, L., Powys Whyte, K. (2014) Philosophy in the Field: Care Ethics, Participatory Virtues, and Sustainability, *Resilience* (1:3)

Gould, R K., Martinez, D E., Hoelting, K R. (2023) Exploring Indigenous relationality to inform the relation turn in sustainability science, *Ecosystems and People* (19:1)

Griffiths, P E. (2022) Why the 'interdisciplinary' push in universities is actually a dangerous antidisciplinary trend, *The Conversation*, https://theconversation.com/why-the-interdisciplinary-push-in-universities-is-actually-a-dangerous-antidisciplinary-trend-175511#:~:text=It's%20likely%20not%20an%20interdisciplinary,to%20redefine%20it%20as%20such. Accessed 7/5/24

Groenhout, R. E. (2004) *Connected Lives: Human Nature and an Ethics of Care* (Rowman and Littlefield)

Haig-Brown, C., Hodson, J. (2009) Starting with the land: Toward indigenous though in Canadian education, in, Woods, P., Woods., G. (eds.) *Alternative education for the 21st Century: Philosophies, approaches, visions* (Palgrave MacMillan)

Halle-Erby, K. (2024) “Relationships are reality”: centering relationality to investigate land, indigeneity, blackness, and futurity, *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education* (37:1)

Hampton, E. (1995) Memory Comes Before Knowledge: Research May Improve if Researchers Remember Their Motives, *Canadian Journal of Native Education* (21)

Haraway, D. (1988) Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective, *Feminist Studies* (14:3)

Harding, S. (2015) *Objectivity and Diversity: Another Logic of Scientific Research* (University of Chicago Press)

Hayes, N. (2021) *The Book of Trespass: Crossing the Lines that Divide Us* (London: Bloomsbury Publishers)

Heineman, J. (2019) Pussy Patrols in Academia: Towards a Disobedient, Sex-Worker Inclusive Feminist Praxis. *Feminist Formations* (31:1)

Held, M B E. (2023) Decolonizing Science: Undoing the Colonial and Racist Hegemony of Western Science, *Journal of MultiDisciplinary Evaluation* (19:44)

Holland, J. (2007) Emotions and research, *International Journal of Social Research Methodology* (10:3)

Jadallah, C. (2024) Positionality, relationality, place, and land: Considerations for ethical research with communities, *Qualitative Research* (25:1)

Jones, O. (2015) “Not Promising a Landfall…”: An Autotopographical Account of Loss of Place, Memory and Landscape, *Environmental Humanities* (6)

Koggel, C. M. (1998) *Perspectives on Equality: Constructing a Relational Theory* (Rowman and Littlefield)

Koskinen, I. (2022) How institutional solutions meant to increase diversity in science fail, *Synthese* (200:483)

Koskinen, I., Rolin, K. (2019) Scientific/intellectual movements remedying epistemic injustice: The case of Indigenous studies, *Philosophy of Science* (86:5)

Lakoff, G., Johnson, M. (1999) *Philosophy in the flesh: the embodies mind and its challenge to Western thought* (Basic Books)

Latour, B. (1999) *Pandora's Hope: Essays on the Reality of Science Studies* (Harvard University Press)

Law, J. (2004) *After Method: mess in social science research* (Routledge)

Lees, J., Haigh, R., Tucker, S. (2017) Therapeutic communities and group analysis, *International Journal of Therapeutic Communities* (38:2)

Mäki, A., Walsh, A., Pinto, F. (2018) *Scientific imperialism: Exploring the boundaries of interdisciplinarity* (Routledge)

Mannay, D. (2018) Emotion and the Researcher: Sites, Subjectivities, and Relationships, *Studies in Qualitative Methodology* (16:1-15)

Macfarlane, B. (2021) Methodology, Fake Learning, and Emotional Performativity, *ECNU Review of Education* (5:1)

Marin, A., Bang, M. (2018) "Look it, this is how you know." Family forest walks as a context for knowledge-building about the natural world, *Cognition and Instruction* (36:2)

Mellor, F. (2003) Between fact and fiction: Demarcating science from non-science in popular physics books, *Social Studies of Science* (33:4)

Meloni, F. (2020) A boat taking on water: Rethinking emotions and the politics of knowledge in ethnography research with "hard-to-reach" and marginalised populations, *Emotion, Space and Society* (36)

Merleau-Ponty, M. (1969) *The Visible and the Invisible: Studies in Phenomenology and Existential Philosophy* (Northwestern University Press)

Merleau-Ponty, M. (2012 [1945]) *Phenomenology of Perception* (Routledge)

Moore, J. (2015) *Capitalism in the Web of Life: Ecology and the Accumulation of Capital* (Verso Books)

Moralli, M. (2023) Research as care: Positionality and reflexivity in qualitative migration research, *Qualitative Research* (24:3)

Mountz, A., Bonds, A., Mansfield, B., Loyd, J., Hyndman, J., Walton-Roberts, M., Basu, R., Whitson, R., Hawkins, R., Hamilton, T., Curran, W. (2015) For Slow Scholarship: A Feminist Politics of Resistance through Collective Action in the Neoliberal University, *ACME* (14:4)

Muirhead, B., Almås, R. (2012) The Evolution of Western Agricultural Policy since 1945, in, Almås, R., Campbell, H. (eds.) *Rethinking Agricultural Policy Regimes: Food Security, Climate Change, and the Future of Resilience of Global Agriculture* (Bradford: Emerald Publishing Limited)

Narayan, U. (1988) Working Together across Difference: Some Consideration on Emotions and Political Practice, *Hypatia* (3:2)

National Health Service (NHS) (n.d.a) Treatment: Post-traumatic stress disorder, https://www.nhs.uk/mental-health/conditions/post-traumatic-stress-disorder-ptsd/treatment/#:~:text=Eye%20movement%20desensitisation%20and%20reprocessing%20(EMDR)%20is%20a%20psychological%20treatment,movement%20of%20your%20therapist's%20finger. Accessed 20/5/24

NHS (n.d.b) Democratic therapeutic community treatment (DTC), Pennine Care NHS Foundation Trust, https://www.penninecare.nhs.uk/dtc Accessed 10/5/24

New International Version (1984) *The Holy Bible* (Zondervan Publishing House)

Parkinson, H J. (2018) 'It's nothing like a broken leg': why I'm done with the mental health conversation, *The Guardian*, https://www.theguardian.com/society/2018/jun/30/nothing-like-broken-leg-mental-health-conversation Accessed 6/5/24

Pearce, S., Haigh, R. (2017) *The Theory and Practice of Democratic Therapeutic Community Treatment* (Jessica Kingsley Publishers)

Pearce, S., Pickard, H. (2012) How therapeutic communities work: Specific factors related to positive outcome, *International Journal of Social Psychiatry* (59: 7)

Renaudie, P J. (2020) The History of the Phenomenological Movement, in, de Santis, D., Hopkins, B C., Majolino, C. (eds.) *The Routledge Handbook of Phenomenology and Phenomenological Philosophy* (Taylor and Francis)

Reyes, V. (2020) Ethnographic toolkit: Strategic positionality and researchers' visible and invisible tools in field research, *Ethnography* (21:2)

Rikap, C., Harari-Kermadec, H. (2020). The direct subordination of universities to the accumulation of capital, *Capital and Class* (44:3),

Rose, G. (1997) Situating knowledges: positionality, reflexivities and other tactics, *Progress in Human Geography* (21:3)

Smith, D. (1992) Sociology from Women's Experience: A Reaffirmation, *Sociological Theory* (10:1)

Spyrou, S. (2024) From extractivist practices and the child-as-data to an ethics of reciprocity and mutuality in empirical childhood research, *Childhood* (31:1)

Styres, S., Zinga, D. (2013) The Community-First Land-Centred Theoretical Framework: Bringing a 'Good Mind' to Indigenous Education Research? *Canadian Journal of Education* (36:2)

Todd, Z. (2016) An Indigenous Feminist's Take on the Ontological Turn: 'Ontology' Is Just Another Word For Colonialism, *Journal of Historical Sociology* (29:1)

Toikko, T. (2016) Becoming an expert by experience: An analysis of service users' learning process, *Social Work in Mental Health* (14:3)

Tronto, J C. (2015) Theories of care as a challenge to Weberian paradigms in social science, in, Engster, D., Hamington, M. (eds.) *Care Ethics and Political Theory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press)

Tynan, L., Bishop, M. (2019) Disembodied experts, accountability and refusal: An autoethnography of two (ab)original women, *Australian Journal of Human Rights* (25:2)

Waring, C. M. (2022) The Prostitute and the PhD: Navigating Academic Spaces as a Tainted Researcher, in, Jones, D., Sanders, T. (eds.) *Student Sex Work: International Perspectives and Implications for Policy and Practice* (Springer International Publishing)

Watts, J. (2024) The epistemic injustice of borderline personality disorder, *British Journal of Psychology International* (21:4)

Wilson, G A. (2001a) From Productivism to Post-Productivism…and Back Again? Exploring the (Un)changed Natural and Mental Landscapes of European Agriculture, *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* (26:1)

Wilson, S. (2001b) Self-as-relationship in Indigenous Research, *Canadian Journal of Native Education* (25:2)

Wilson, S. (2008) *Research is Ceremony* (Fernwood Publishing)

Wynne, B. (1996) May the sheep safely graze? A reflexive view of the expert-lay knowledge divide, in, Lash, M.,Wynne, B., Szerszynski, B. (eds.) *Risk, Environment and Modernity: Towards a New Ecology* (SAGE)

Interlude

My middle name is Victoria. It comes from the Latin word for 'victory'. I've never really warmed to my middle name very much – I don't feel like the walking personification of 'victory' and the war-like connotations make me a bit uncomfortable. My older brother is George Zephaniah (Zephaniah is a family name) and my parents wanted to give me a middle name with an interesting initial, like his. The choices were between Victoria and Xanthia for my middle name and, whilst my Mum says she regrets not going for the latter, I found that it means 'fair haired' or blonde. I have very dark hair and the only 'fair hair' in my immediate family is our predisposition to going grey very early, so maybe Victoria is a better fit.

By itself, Victoria doesn't suit me or this thesis very much. However, when I think of it as the suffix to Grace, maybe the victory of grace does fit quite nicely. In the paper preceding this, I outlined how this victory of grace came about. What precedes is the outcome of this – the papers which came about from 'following' the narratives in interviews, rather than my own predetermined ideas about what is important to farmers. The writing style changes within the next three papers, away from a more creative style and towards a more classic form of academic writing. In line with a philosophy of relationality, this stylistic change considers the relationship between the writer and the reader, and the broader, more established community of academia, and adopts a more conventional approach. This is done so that the information may be communicated in a language suitable for the desired audiences (academic and governance spheres), as detailed in Chapter 2.

The introductory preamble I give to each paper will still be written in my own voice – I am still guiding us through the pages. As I said at the start of the paper in Chapter 4, once you write yourself in, it is hard to really write yourself out again. It would feel a little rude not to address you directly and conversationally between papers, akin to refusing to acknowledge someone you know on the street. Plus, I rather like our little chats and I think they are an effective way for both of us to stay grounded between periods of more abstract discussion.

Chapter 5: "*Evil accountants*" and "*the biggest bastards in the country*": Productivism, post-productivism and farmer perceptions of supermarket power in the UK

Two things that really surprised me from interview transcripts were that farmers often downplayed the influence of policy on their practice and that supermarkets were a recurrent theme within discussions. On top of this, the productivism to post productivism literature discussed in Chapter 2 makes little mention of retailers, or corporations more generally (Burch and Lawrence, 2007; Clapp, 2021, 2022; Konefal et al., 2005; Potter and Tilzey, 2008; Wilson, 2001). This paper addresses this literature gap and presents farmer perceptions of retailers alongside their perceptions of the role of policy, something that is also discussed further in Chapter 7.

In an attempt to follow my nose down the supermarket trail, I called in a second nose to assist me in my sniffing. What follows is a co-authored paper with my supervisor, Dr Emma Cardwell (sorry Emma, I have just objectified you to the highest degree by reducing you to a nose!). I did the majority of the work for what is presented here, but Emma's speciality in Economic Geography was helpful for fleshing out the ways policy, and life in general, is shaped by corporate actors. Her knowledge of corporate behaviour on a more global scale, such as the ownership structure of the 'big four' supermarkets, was also helpful for developing this paper's core arguments. Under the 'CRediT' taxonomy, the work undertaken by myself and Emma can be described thusly:

Conceptualisation – GB
Data Curation – GB
Formal analysis – GB
Investigation – GB
Methodology – GB
Supervision – EC
Writing – original draft - GB and EC
Writing – review and editing – GB and EC

As is required by University guidelines, there is written confirmation provided in Appendix 2 of this thesis which confirms that my co-author and I are aligned with this description of the workload.

Besides making an important and original contribution to scholarship by identifying the gap within the productivism/post-productivism literature, this paper also identifies the ways farmers respond to 'hybrid' demands (Beachem et al., 2023). These are hybrid as they encompass both productivist ideals of food production and more multifunctional or broadly 'post-productivist' expectations increasingly placed on agriculture. By centring the salience of supermarkets within interview discussions, this paper also stresses the importance of considering the role that food chain and market actors play in influencing farmer behaviour. This is something that, as I discussed in Chapter 2, a narrow focus on policy can overlook leading to incomplete understandings of agricultural life. A theme throughout this thesis and within this paper specifically, is the importance of listening to the on-the-ground experience of farmers, especially within areas of scholarship that are often policy-oriented (O'Connor et al., 2025).

This paper is currently under peer review with the *Journal of Rural Studies*.

References

Beacham, J D., Jackson, P., Jaworski, C C., Krzywoszynska, A., Dicks, L V. (2023) Contextualising farmer perspectives on regenerative agriculture: A post-productivist future? *Journal of Rural Studies* (102)

Burch, D., Lawrence, G. (2007) *Supermarkets and Agri-Food Supply Chains: Transformations in the production and consumption of foods* (Edward Elgar)

Clapp, J. (2021) The problem with growing corporate concentration and power in the global food system, *Nature Food* (2)

Clapp, J. (2022) The rise of big food and agriculture: corporate influence in the food system, in, Sage, C. (Ed.) *A research agenda for food systems* (Edward Elgar)

Konefal, J., Mascarenhas, M., Hatanaka, M. (2005) Governance in the global agro-food system: Backlighting the role of transnational supermarket chains, *Agriculture and Human Values* (22)

O'Connor, G., Rels, K., Desha, C., Burkett, I. (2025) Valuing farmers in transitions to more sustainable food systems: A systematic literature review of local food producers' experience and contributions in short food supply chains, *Agriculture and Human Values* (42)

Potter, C., Tilzey, M. (2008) Productivism versus Post-Productivism? Modes of Agri-Environmental Governance in Post-Fordist Agricultural Transitions, in, Robinson, G. (ed.) *Perspectives on Rural Policy and Planning* (Ashgate)

Wilson, G A. (2001) From productivism to post-productivism…and Back Again? Exploring the (Un)changed Nature and Mental Landscapes of European Agriculture, *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* (26:1)

"*Evil accountants*" and "*the biggest bastards in the country*": Productivism, post-productivism and farmer perceptions of supermarket power in the UK

Abstract: In rural and agrarian studies, 'productivism' and 'post-productivism' are key frameworks for understanding post-1990s changes in European agriculture. However, while policy shifts are evident, critics argue these changes have not fully or evenly influenced farming practices. Using semi-structured interviews, this research explored the extent of this permeation and found that, whilst the productivist mindset remained strong, some change aligned with post-productivism. Notably, my interview data also uncovered that, instead of pointing to policy, interviewees consistently brought up supermarkets as having a major influence on their farming. This is a topic notably absent from the productivism to post-productivism literature, a gap we argue should be addressed to best understand agrarian change. This paper explores the ways in which supermarkets influence farm practice, drawing on corporate dominance over agri-food supply chains literature. Specifically, we examine supermarkets' oligopolistic control over agri-food chains which gives them power over prices, contracts, and standards, noting the impact that this has on farmers. We also examine the influence supermarkets and corporations have on policy agenda setting. We suggest that the omission of supermarket influence within post-productivism literature could be because policy documents are more accessible for academic analysis, in comparison to more obscure data pertaining to food supply chains and broader market drivers. This gap would not have been identified without farmer-led interviews, highlighting the importance of centring farmers' voices in rural and agrarian research.

Key words: productivism; post-productivism; supermarkets; food retail; UK farming; governance

1. Introduction

In the twenty first century, 'productivism' and 'post-productivism' have become two of the most recognisable academic concepts to emerge from rural and agrarian studies. The explanatory power of a productivist to post-productivist transition for understanding broad changes in European agriculture since the 1990s has gained significant traction. Though first gaining popularity at the end of the twentieth century, productivism and post-productivism continue to play a prominent role in the formulation of academic debate on the rural to the present day (e.g. Beacham et al., 2023; Matthews et al., 2025).

Productivism describes the British post-war "commitment to an intensive, industrially driven and expansionist agriculture with state support based primarily on output and increased productivity" (Lowe et al., 1993: 221). There is a lack of consensus on a concise classification of post-productivism, especially during the term's most prolific years. Some sources define it largely in its opposition to productivism (Marsden et al., 1993), with Ilbery and Bowler (1998) writing that post-productivism encapsulates three "dimensions of change": intensification to extensification (meaning a reduction in farm inputs, largely for environmental reasons); concentration to dispersal; and specialisation to diversification. Other definitions comprise a broader inclusion of policy actors (Marsden et al., 1993; Lowe et al., 1986; Hart and Wilson, 1998); the reduction in and change of direction of state support for agriculture (Lowe et al., 1993; Marsden, 1998); growing concern for environmental protection (Boisson and Buller, 1996); and/or attempts to integrate a diversity of objectives into rural and agrarian land use (Ward, 1993; Lowe et al., 1993). In a critical approach, Evans et al. isolate it to five broad categories:

"*[T]he shift from quantity to quality in food production; the growth of on-farm diversification and off-farm employment (pluriactivity); extensification and the promotion of sustainable farming through agri-environmental policy; dispersion of production patterns; environmental regulation and restricting of government support for agriculture.*" (2002: 317)

There is evidence of a transition along these lines in the UK. Most importantly, agricultural policy has seen a shift from prioritising food production through subsidies towards environmental performance; both under the EU, and, after Brexit, national agricultural policies. This is reflected on the ground by reductions in fertiliser use, reductions in the number of people employed in farming, and the diversification of income streams through pluriactivity. However, evidence also exists to counter this narrative. For example, agricultural outputs in Britain increased by 32% between 1973 and 2025, with total factor productivity increasing by 51% due to the reduction in inputs (DEFRA, 2025a). Average UK farm sizes have increased, with a particular increase in the number of farms over 200 hectares (ha) (CPRE, 2017). Dairy herd sizes and stocking rates have increased, with milk yields doubling since the 1970s (AHDB, 2023; Uberoi, 2021). The number of concentrated animal feeding operations has increased (Prior, 2024), with factory farming of pigs and poultry in the UK rising by 20% between 2016 and 2023 (CIWF, 2025). While fertiliser use has declined, pesticide use – measured by treated area and application frequency – has increased (Friends of the Earth, 2019). While this paper engages with UK-level agri-food structures and

literature, the empirical focus is on English farming, particularly in relation to post-Brexit agricultural policy, which is devolved.

Beacham et al. (2023) have identified how contemporary UK farms must attempt to balance a hybrid position of both productivist and post-productivist pressures, often in tension. Building on this, we present one of the main sources of these pressures: supermarket oligopoly and control over the supply chain. Whilst the productivist to post-productivist shift remains important for conceptualising developments in UK and European agricultural policy since the 1980s, we argue that it can hide the fundamental role that food chain and market actors – particularly supermarkets – have in driving farmer behaviour. This means post-productivist changes that decrease costs (such as reducing fertiliser inputs, or pluriactivity such as diversification or seeking off farm employment) can occur alongside the productivist intensification of farming, concentration of farm size, and increased pesticide use. This can appear contradictory with a narrow focus on policy.

It is difficult for academics to fully understand the role of market drivers of agrarian change due to the relative dearth of data on food supply chains, which largely unfold in a commercial world protected from public scrutiny. Democratic access to policy and government data, in comparison, means that policies and their effects can be mapped, though some transparency gaps exist around issues like lobbying. As UK supermarkets shift from corporate to private equity ownership, supply chain relationships and the values and actions driving the farm-supermarket nexus move even further into a hidden abode and away from public scrutiny, raising important questions about democracy in an oligopsonic system.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Productivism-to-post-productivism: a UK perspective

During the 1990s, the post-Fordist agricultural transition, specifically in the UK, was conceptualised within rural studies literature as a shift from productivism-to-post-productivism (Evans et al., 2002; Potter and Tilzey, 2005). The most cited definition of productivism comes from Lowe et al. who describe it as ‘‘a commitment to an intensive, industrially driven and expansionist agriculture with state support based primarily on output and increased productivity” (1993: 221). However, this definition was developed retrospectively in contrast to post-productivism, and the term itself emerged as an analytical category rather than as a singular, self-conscious model articulated in the immediate post-war era. Frascarelli defines post-productivism as “characterized by both the presence of a series of

activities in rural areas, diversified from the mere production of commodities, and by the growing demand for goods – by users of these areas – that are not appreciated by the market, such as landscape and amenities" (2024: 58-59). However, post-productivism has been historically criticised for its lack of clear definition as well as an elusive timeline that attempted to fit a spectrum of farming practices, views, and policy changes into an overly dualistic format (Evans et al., 2002; Wilson, 2001). Halfacree points to the 1970s for the shift towards a post-productivist agricultural regime (1997), although more scholars identify the 1980s (Boisson and Buller, 1996: 111; Ilbery and Bowler, 1998; Wilson and Wilson, 1997; Yarwood and Evans, 1999) with some inclusion of 1990s legislative changes (Mather et al., 1996). References to the term in the literature begin in the early 1990s (Shucksmith, 1993; Ward, 1993), reaching popularity in the late 1990s (Halfacree, 1997; 1999; Marsden, 1998; Wilson and Wilson, 1997), before facing considerable critique in the early 2000s (Evans et al., 2002; Wilson, 2001; Walford, 2003; Potter and Tilzey, 2005), though still maintaining theoretical relevance today (Beacham et al., 2023; Matthews et al., 2025).

A key critique of the productivism to post-productivism approach was a lack of empirical evidence. Wilson outlines how a neglect of "actor orientated and behaviourally grounded" research is partly to blame for the widespread, uncritical acceptance of the overly top-down model of the supposed shift to post-productivism (2001). His critique, drawing on wider empirical data (Morris and Potter, 1995; Wilson, 1996, 1997; Lobley and Potter, 1998; Ward et al., 1998), shows how grassroots actors present "a plurality of often highly disparate opinions… [from] diverse actor communities that can neither be branded 'productivist' or 'post-productivist'" (2001: 87). He argued that only when farmers' attitudes are shown to change can any semblance of 'post'-productivism be evidenced (2001: 87). Such evidence was not available to support this, with farmers presenting actively productivist attitudes and being particularly critical of 'green' agricultural policies (Potter, 1998; Morris and Potter, 1995; Lobley and Potter, 1998). In the face of this critique, studies were conducted specifically with this framework in mind. Evans et al. (2002) found little farm-level evidence for their five characteristics of post productivism outlined in section one. Similarly, Walford's study of South East England concluded that "far from the demise of productivism, it is alive and well" (2003: 500).

The post-productivist moment in rural studies is easier to understand when viewed from the top-down perspective. There is clear evidence for a policy change from productivism-to-post-productivism, although Wilson argues this is over relied on as evidence of 'actual'

change (2001: 83). The 1980s saw a shift towards post-productivism on the UK and European policy level (Marsden et al., 1993; Ilbery and Bowler, 1998). The Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) underwent significant changes, with the 1992 MacSharry Reforms aiming to intervene with agricultural overproduction and increase sustainability within EU farming. Regulation 2078/92, also in 1992, was another legislative piece of evidence for post-productivism, as argued by Boisson and Buller (1996). Agenda 2000 further continued some of the pro-environment changes implemented by the MacSharry Reforms (Buller et al., 2000). 2014 and 2020 reforms to the CAP, and water framework and nitrates directives also represented significant policy shifts.

When Britain voted to leave the European Union, Environmental Land Management Schemes (ELMS), the replacement of CAP within England, took a "public money for public goods" approach, where farms are paid for outputs which benefit society but are unrewarded by the market (Clark et al., 2024; see also Kam et al., 2023). ELMS is comprised of three schemes: the Sustainable Farming Incentive (SFI), which offers payment for environmentally friendly practices which operate alongside food production; Countryside Stewardship, which rewards more complex land management which is environmentally beneficial and/or contributes to climate change mitigation; and Landscape Recovery, a scheme which funds "bespoke, longer-term, larger scale projects to enhance the natural environment" (DEFRA, 2023) using both public and private sources (NFU, 2024). This paper will focus on SFI.

SFI operates similarly to pre-Brexit agri-environmental schemes, in that it focuses on smaller changes which happen alongside farming. Under ELMS, government support has shifted away from direct payments (although this transition was already underway with CAP reforms) to funding based on specific outcomes. The amount paid by the SFI is based on "income forgone plus costs" (Baker, 2024) which sees lowland farmers, who earn more for their produce overall, able to claim more than their uplands counterparts. The National Farmers' Union (NFU) estimates these changes can reduce upland farm incomes by almost 40% (Case, 2023). This shows clear evidence of a shift away from "intensive, industrially driven and expansionist agriculture with state support based primarily on output" (Lowe et al., 1993: 221) and towards "the promotion of sustainable farming through agri-environmental policy…environmental regulation and restricting of government support for agriculture" (Evans et al., 2002: 317).

There are, however, several issues with this top-down policy perspective to understanding regime change. The first, as already discussed, is that policy does not necessarily equal on-the-ground changes in practice or attitudes – an "implementation gap" (Wilson, 2001: 88). Second, many of these changes were either later watered down or perhaps not as purely-post productivist as originally framed (Whitby, 1996; Potter, 1998; Wilson, 2001; Hart and Wilson, 1998). Critical literature argues that, while policy has shifted away from productivism, these changes have not permeated farming practice as evenly or deeply as initially suggested (Walford, 2003; Cusworth and Dodsworth, 2021; Burton and Paragahawewa, 2011).

2.2 Corporations and UK farming

Another driver of agrarian change are economic structures of the global food system. The General Agreements on Tariff and Trade discussions in Uruguay from 1986-1993 aimed to open European agriculture up to the global market, reducing subsidies and tariff protection for food production, a key element of post-productivism (Muirhead and Almås, 2012: 37). Agricultural production for world markets has since shifted to the Global South, with Northern countries producing 50% of output in 1995, but only 20% by 2020 (Goyal et al., 2025). A small and consolidating number of corporations dominate seeds, inputs, and agricultural commodity trading; almost all of which are domiciled in the Global North (Clapp, 2022). Tax haven states show a high level of corporate value capture through the shift of profits to low tax jurisdictions: around 40% of multinational profits are estimated to be held in such tax havens, with many large agricultural companies such as Cargill and Louis Dreyfus holding trading offices in Singapore for tax avoidance reasons (Goyal et al., 2025). Although the productivism-to-post-productivism literature addresses international policy change, it largely overlooks oligopolistic firms and the financial deregulation enabling them, despite extensive research on food system consolidation, particularly in the USA (Clapp, 2022; Greenberg, 2017).

One key area of oligopoly in UK food systems is retail. Substantial consolidation has occurred in the UK food retail sector, with the 'big four' supermarkets (Tesco, Sainsbury's, ASDA and Morrisons) and the two discount retailers (ALDI and Lidl) holding an 82.5% market share (Danielle, 2025). The UK imports most of its fruit and vegetables (though a minority of meat, see FSA, 2022) meaning farmers must now compete to supply these large retailers, who have both significant purchasing power and global sourcing hubs (Seth and

Randall, 2020). The shift from specialist stores towards supermarkets as primary retailers began in the 1950s, accelerating in the 1960s following the removal of resale price maintenance which allowed manufacturers to set consistent markups for retailers. By 1969, there were 3400 supermarkets in Britain (Hamlett et al., 2008). By 2025, the six retailers named above had approximately nine thousand stores in the UK (Danielle, 2025). The retail buying power of supermarkets is one primary characteristic of the UK food chain, with supermarkets being both buyers of farm produce, sellers (of packaging, promotion and shelf space) to farms, and competitors to branded producers or manufacturers (through own-brand products, see Dobson, 2004).

3. Methods

This research is based on 41 semi-structured interviews with English farmers, conducted in summer 2023. The discussions were conversational and participant led, with the intention of employing a grounded theory approach, asking farmers broad questions about their farm and aiming to avoid leading participants towards 'desired' answers (Glaser and Strauss, 2017). An interpretivist approach allowed prior theoretical sensitivity to inform, rather than bracket, analysis (Sebastian, 2019). The intention was to centre farmers' voices and experiences, allowing the focus of the research to emerge from their priorities, rather than *a priori* set questions. In this spirit, interviewee quotes are shared verbatim in the paper, to allow farmers to speak for themselves. Interviews did cover preset themes: farmer history; history of the farmland and enterprise; motivations for farming and what being a farmer means to the individual; policy impact; increased focus on sustainability within farm practice; predictions for the future of farming both on an individual and industry-wide scale.

Participants were recruited primarily through regional online directories (e.g. Yellow Pages), with additional contacts generated via word-of-mouth and snowball sampling. Recruitment continued until saturation was reached. Prospective participants were approached by email, telephone, or post, and interviews were subsequently conducted face-to-face, typically lasting between one and two hours. 33 interviews involved a single participant, while eight included a second individual actively involved in the farm enterprise. Written consent was obtained from all primary participants, and verbal consent from secondary participants. Interviews were audio-recorded, transcribed verbatim, and analysed thematically using NVivo and manual coding. Transcripts were coded manually and using NVivo, beginning with open coding and followed by iterative rounds of advanced coding. The study adhered to principles

of informed consent, confidentiality, and anonymity, and received ethical approval from Lancaster University. To preserve anonymity, participants are identified numerically (P1, P2, etc.).

While the data collected was not from a statistically representative sample of farms, a maximum variation sample was used to ensure diversity across farm types, sizes, locations within England, and route to market types, giving a breadth of analysis. Farm sizes ranged from under 20ha to over 100ha and included 11 mixed farms, 18 livestock farms (four mixed livestock, five beef, five dairy, two sheep, one goat, one egg production), seven arable and five horticultural farms. Participants ranged from their 20s to 80s and represented early-, mid-, and later-career farmers. Although this study engages with UK-wide literature and agri-food system dynamics, the empirical data were collected exclusively in England. This is particularly important given that agricultural policy is a devolved matter within the UK, and the post-Brexit policy framework discussed in this paper (e.g. ELMS) applies specifically to England. References to the "UK" therefore relate primarily to broader structural factors – such as supermarket power, supply chains, and national-level data – while analysis of policy and practice is grounded in the English context.

Geographically, interviewees were distributed across the North East (five), North West (12), Midlands (six), South East (eight), and South West (ten). Route to market refers to whether the business sells agricultural product into commercial supply chains and/or direct-to-consumer sales, with the category of produce also noted (food or non-food agricultural produce such as hay or biofuel crops). 30 farmers sold directly into commercial supply chains, six sold direct to consumer, two sold both direct-to-consumer and into commercial supply chains, and one farm operated solely as a charitable organisation with produce donated to local charities and food banks. Two interviews were conducted with semi-retired farmers (P4 and P41). Both were still residing on and engaged with their farms, but most farm work was contracted out. Historically, one had sold direct-to-consumer and the other into commercial supply chains. The study aimed to develop theoretically informed, interpretive understandings of how farmers navigate agricultural change, rather than to achieve statistical generalisation.

4. Results

4.1 Policy and practice

Interviewees identified changes in their practices which align with the post-productivist transition. This was particularly the case for diversification, such as introducing glamping (P31) or holiday accommodation (P33). 19 farmers interviewed had diversified, with five wishing to who had not already done so. All five horticultural and four out of the five dairy farmers had diversified. Although the sample is not statistically representative, the pattern observed may reflect differences between farm types. Horticultural and dairy businesses face distinct production conditions and economic pressures, such as low price per unit, perishable products, and produce suited to local supply chain sales through diversification methods such as farm shops and pick-your-own. The post-productivist ethos of reduced inputs was also discussed. Notably, some interviewees explained this as primarily a response to the need to decrease costs to maintain the same income from farming:

"We didn't weed kill for many years, mainly because of the price, if anything. But the weeds got out of hand." (P10)

"Number one priority for a farmer is to make the crops deliver. But how they deliver, if they deliver with minimum input … Everything is so precisely done because this is costing." (P7)

This is supported by data on fertiliser prices, which have increased significantly over the last two decades (AHDB, 2022). Despite a transition towards predominantly agri-environmental schemes and away from direct payments, when participants were asked how policy impacts their farming, the most common response was that *"it doesn't"* (P36):

"it's really insignificant in the scheme of things" (P9)

"[policy] doesn't influence me one iota" (P4)

This isn't to say that farmers ignore or refuse engagement with policy – 23 farmers noted that they would or do engage with agri-environmental schemes if there was a "goodness of fit" with their pre-existing practice (Riley, 2016: 8) but that they did not consider policy in their initial decisions around practice. Whilst three farmers did say that they integrate policy into their planned practice, six stated that policy does not have *any* influence on their work. There were no significant correlations between these perspectives and farm type or size. One

participant who did identify policy as having a significant impact on how their farm business is structured said:

"[policy] completely influences what we do, we're entirely reliant on government funding…more than 60% of our business is agri-environment scheme income to deliver nature conservation. So, unlike probably some of the farmers you deal with, that has always been the focus of our business, let's manage land extensively and maximise nature on it and be paid by the taxpayer to do that as best we can be." (P37)

Although a livestock farm, this participant described his business as *"basically conservation, we manage nature reserves"*, in contrast to the food production emphasis common with other respondents. Variations in farm size were identified by one participant as a reason for policy's relative toothlessness, with farms being "*too big to worry about it*" or so small that the impact of not adhering to regulations is "*miniscule*" (P5). Coding revealed that subsidies were frequently mentioned as a key driver for policy engagement, although subsidy access generally was described as harder for smaller farms with less capacity and policy expertise (see Singleton, 2010):

"A lot of farmers are put off applying because they don't know how to apply or they're too small and they can't afford an advisor." (P30, 100+ha)

"The farm's too small for me to go into a high level of stewardship and for it not to take over an awful lot of my life for quite a small amount of money and quite a small farm." (P2, 20-50ha)

These smaller farmers felt the subsidies were designed to be claimed by larger farms, and represented only a relatively minor financial gain:

"I'll tell you why policy doesn't impact us all that much, it's because we're just not big enough… I feel like policy is just all about these massive farms, obviously, and all their subsidies and this and that." (P1, >20ha)

Larger farms had a similar, if reversed, logic, arguing that potential subsidy income was small in comparison to their overall turnover:

"I think, last year, we got £19,000 worth of single farm payment…It's peanuts in £4m turnover." (P17, 100+ha)

Turning to the available statistical data, income from subsidies is still an important part of some farming finances, although this varies by farm type (DEFRA, 2025b). Subsidy income is particularly important for grazing livestock and mixed farms (Little et al., 2023) but interviewees in this demographic were still noncommittal about policy impacting their farming behaviour, reporting that subsidies often paid them for what they were already doing, rather than driving behavioural change (Burton and Paragahawewa, 2011):

"[The SFI is] really paying us to do what we've been doing for a long time because we've been doing that anyway." (P22)

"[We've] been in a high-level stewardship scheme for however many years, and before that they were in ESAs [Environmentally Sensitive Area Schemes]. Yes, this farm has been doing the environmental work for 30-plus years... It's not new. No, not new. Yes, they used to still farm traditionally how it was years ago. Nothing really has changed too much." (P13)

This aligns with critiques of post-productivism that state the impact of policy changes on farmers' behaviour can be overstated (Wilson, 2001). While quantitative data shows that subsidies can significantly affect some farm incomes (DEFRA, 2025b), most interviewees stated that policy did not significantly shape their farming *practice*. Income from government does not necessarily translate into influence over on-the-ground behaviour, although current policy movement under ELMS may change this.

4.2. Supermarkets

Instead of pointing to policy, interviewees consistently brought up supermarkets as having a major influence on their behaviour, a topic notably absent from the productivism-to-post-productivism literature. Given that 98% of food in the UK is purchased from supermarkets (Hasnain et al., 2020), it is crucial to look at their role when considering English farming prospects. Some participants did have positive things to say about supermarkets. P6 noted the receipt of a funding grant for an agricultural leadership course from Tesco, and P38 defined their relationship with supermarkets as a *"carrot and a stick"* approach, noting that:

"The public get their information from supermarkets. You often hear the supermarkets, "We sell what the public wants." No. The public can only buy what we're offering, so they can't really. If the public were to say, "Actually, I want green tomatoes this week." It doesn't

happen. You buy what you're given…Supermarkets, actually, are driving that faster than government are. They are so concerned about, for example, if you're sitting waiting for cows to cross the road and there are three or four lame cows at the end, and behind them is a sign saying, 'We supply Sainsbury's', you're going to associate lame cows with Sainsbury's milk. They are very fearful of how their image comes across, so they're driving us to be better and better and better…Sainsbury's are driving a lot of good through the system. They have so much information on us, it's ridiculous. They probably know a lot more about my farm than I do…We are on a cost of production basis. In some sense, it's the holy grail. If I'm better than the top 50% in the Sainsbury's group, I can't fail to make money, because they've got my cost of production, and they're paying me a margin on top of that."

Most discussions took a different tone. Interviewees P6 and P25 spoke negatively about supermarkets in general but were able to offer positive remarks about specific experiences with reliable buyers, for example:

"Booths as a company, it shows you can run a supermarket properly, and you don't have to be this evil… They're all to do with PLCs and making money for the shareholders. Booths can treat you like a person. You can fall out sometimes…But they pulled us through, in this area, because we got in there early. They pulled us through, with potatoes, 100 potatoes for winter, caulis in summer and beetroot." (P25)

Unlike the big four, Booths, a regional supermarket chain, remains in family ownership and has never been incorporated.

Other interviewees expressed discomfort about the control exercised by supermarkets:

"The supermarkets have got far too much power, haven't they, really, I think. They can drive prices." (P3)

Going further than this, some also questioned the morality of supermarkets:

"We have to have the supermarkets to get rid of volume. But frankly, they are pretty ruthless. They don't give a monkey's about me or my men, or my business." (P9)

"Supermarkets, they're the biggest bastards in the country." (P14)

This defensive position is backed up by corporate food systems literature. The high concentration ratio discussed above allows supermarkets to utilise their dominant market position to pursue increasingly lower prices and encourages "bully boy" tactics when it

comes to retail/supplier interactions (Towill, 2005: 437; Hingley, 2005). The oligopolistic control of the food chain by supermarkets (and large corporations in general) allows them to dictate terms unilaterally.

This structural inequality of bargaining power and subsequent poor behaviour by retailers led to the establishment of two adjudicators in the UK. Following a series of failed attempts to curtail supermarket power leading back to 1999, the Groceries Code Adjudicator was set up in 2013 (Shears, 2013). Despite representing progress, the GCA was not without criticism (Gorecki, 2009) and did not cover all contracts from the farm gate. This meant that farmers who sold to intermediaries who process their produce – e.g. in the dairy industry – remained unprotected; and many farmers felt even direct sales were not being fully regulated. This led to farmers launching a petition to parliament in 2023, asking for the GCA to be reformed (Malik, 2025). The petition surveyed 100 UK fruit and vegetable farmers: 69 supported tougher regulations to balance power between farmers, processors and supermarkets; 49 feared business closure if supermarkets did not "buy what they agreed, pay what they agreed, and pay on time" (UK Parliament Petitions, 2024). This tendency for supermarkets to change the agreed price was mentioned by a soft fruit farmer interviewed:

"supermarkets had the habit of encouraging everybody to plant loads of fruit, saying they'll take it and then when push comes to shove, "Yes we'll take it, but oh the price is going to be this price this week." (P8)

The perishable nature of farm products and the seasonal nature of production adds a layer of vulnerability for farmers, with produce needing to be sold as soon as possible, even if the price offered is not ideal. The establishment of the GCA resulted in 13 adjudications between 2013 and 2024 (GCA, 2024: 12) but reporting requires an extensive knowledge of the rules by farmers, given that "the devil is in the detail" when it comes to policy and contracts (Smith, 2015: 10). It is also recognised that many farmers are afraid to pursue legal action for fear of repercussions (Shears, 2013: 60; Burch and Lawrence, 2007) and whilst the existence of the GCA has been shown to be positive in the short term for producers who raise an issue, long term issues regarding future contracts have been noted (Hurst et al., 2024: 4). As of 2025, only two investigations (into Tesco in 2015, and the Co-op in 2018) have been carried out by the GCA, and it has never fined a retailer (Malik, 2025).

The 2020 Agricultural Act granted the government greater powers to regulate contractual practice (DEFRA, 2024), leading to the creation of the Agricultural Supply Chain Adjudicator

(ASCA) which applies further regulations to businesses which purchase agricultural products from farmers directly. Currently, the ASCA only covers milk and pigs, with the NFU calling for regulations to be expanded to other products (NFU, 2025). While anyone can contact the adjudicator anonymously, anonymous information cannot be used to make a formal complaint, and only formal complaints warrant further investigation (DEFRA, 2025c). Therefore, whilst more contracts come under the ASCA than the GCA, many of the original criticisms of the GCA – contract and policy complexity, fear of repercussions, a lack of anonymity for producers – still stand.

Regardless of legislation, farmers, especially those operating smaller and less visible businesses, remain in the more vulnerable position of price and contract takers, rather than makers (Barlow and Lostak, 2023). As outlined by the creation of the ASCA, many farmers do not have a "direct line" (Case, 2013) with supermarkets when it comes to sales, instead trading through 'middle men' who go on to supply supermarkets. Even farmers who do not sell directly to supermarkets or 'middle men' will still be subject to their pricing power, as supermarkets continue to dominate food retail, being the "obligatory passage point for most food sales" (Oosterveer, 2011). One farmer outlined:

"All our milk has to go to Arla. And we're allowed to self-process a thousand litres a week. So they deliberately keep it really small: bear in mind we sell 1.3 million litres a year. 50,000 a year, it doesn't even touch the sides. So we are dictated a lot to, by that. And then the reason they need to do that is because they need to fulfil supply contracts… we tried to set up with a young couple who wants to make cheese here and we got so far and then I realised that under Arla's rules that we can't sell them any milk, i.e. we can't have a small scale processor on our farm… And it's, kind of, frustrating." (P30)

Being a farmer-owned cooperative, Arla is relatively progressive when it comes to attempting to hand back market power to farmers. However, Arla supplies both direct to supermarkets and to food processing groups who sell final products to supermarkets (e.g. Lurpak, Castello, Puck), meaning supermarket price-setting still heavily influences Arla (Arla, 2024: 23). This outlines the 'trickle down' nature of supermarket power, even when mediated by cooperatives. Farms that try to operate through alternative food networks, avoiding large retailers altogether, also consider themselves disciplined by supermarket price setting:

"That's probably the hardest thing actually, the fact that you're fighting in an unequal fight. You know, you've got the food industry providing all this cheap crap, and they're sort of

applauded for it really, almost. And the supermarkets stock it, everyone wants to buy it. And we're fighting this very difficult battle of telling our customers to pay 20 times the amount and still be happy with it." (P11)

Besides direct price-setting, there are also hidden cuts to the price given to farmers for their produce, as outlined by one interviewee:

"The thing is, with selling cauliflowers to supermarkets, there are so many factors. Everyone will go, "You're getting 40p [per cauliflower]." Well, we are, but then you've got tray hire, so you hire the tray off the supermarket, you hire transport off a supermarket, you hire the bag, you have to buy it off the supermarket. So you've got all that to come off." (P25)

Besides undermining headline prices, these practices also illustrate the unique power dynamics caused by supermarkets being buyers, sellers, and competitors, as outlined by Dobson (2004). Foods essential role makes its market unique in defining what is 'fair.' Everyone must eat, allowing supermarkets to frame price pressures in moral terms. For example, ASDA's recent 'Rollback Campaign' has been described as a "strategy to win back Asda's place in the heart of "hard working families"" (Quinn, 2025). Despite being painted in a self-congratulatory, moralistic light, a great deal of low supermarket pricing is financed by farmers (Burch et al., 2012), as archly summarised by participant 25:

"Supermarkets, what you see on TV, the supermarket, they're all lovely people, friends, but they're just evil accountants. That's all they are. And screw the farmers, screw the planet, really. They just want stuff cheap to make money for shareholders."

4.3 The price incentive for productivism

The productivist mindset was very much present in farmers interviewed, as other researchers have identified (Beacham et al., 2023):

"I think we have a responsibility to feed people and that's why we're farmers." (P9)

"describing farming as a public good is a fucking insult. Excuse my French…we're in the business of feeding the nation…a small part of our role which, frankly has been unpaid forever, is to be the custodians of the countryside." (P28)

Interestingly, intensification and increasing farm sizes were also attributed to supermarket-driven price pressures, sometimes with some resentment:

"We've a job to make a living. We've gone from 20 acres to 200 acres, trying to stand still, producing them for less money… Cheap food is driving— Chickens, you want a cheap chicken, so you can't have nice little hens clucking round the yard, you've got to shove them in a battery and push, push, push. The land, they want it cheap, so they push, push, push. So the people are saying they want sustainability, they're pushing us into unsustainability, really, does that sense?" (P25)

One interviewee (P27) told a story about a peer he saw as "*typical how agriculture has gone in this last 20 years,"* due to corporate buyers' pressure to increase farm size and production*:*

"We've been producing eggs for 20 odd years now, and went with [redacted]. His source of eggs then was small family farms, nice little unit just to keep the thing… Now because he's gone with Sainsbury's and he's gone with McDonald's he needs eggs, so he needs big units and it costs money to take eggs off a small farm as against a big unit…He has been dictated by the supermarkets". (P27)

Interviewees also expressed discomfort at this direction of travel, showing how, whilst farmers do internalise a productivist mindset, this does not always align with a 'bigger is better' approach (Leitschuh et al., 2022: 422):

"It's like the dairy farmer, you can't have a few cows now, a nice little farm where you send them out. You've got to have hundreds, and you've got to drive them hard, and you've got to milk the bones out of them. And once they start dropping, get them killed and get another in.' (P25)

"*I shudder to think about those big dairies.*" (P33)

"The plan is always to expand, to move with the market. The market dictates what we do basically… it's not a farm. It's a business. It's a business, I'm afraid. (P7)

4.4 Environmental performance and private standard setting

Perceptions of supermarket power went beyond price setting influencing farmers' economic feasibility. Although farmers identified some pro-environmental behaviours (such as reductions in fertilisation) as driven by cost-cutting, other environmental and welfare performance indicators were implemented via supermarket diktat, driven by perceived consumer attitudes. These environmental commitments can be seen as one positive aspect of the market pressure of large retailers. McDonald's commitment to only using organic milk in

all its UK outlets, for example, led to a partnership with Arla and investment in The Organic Network to ensure supply (Arla, 2025). The food retail industry has relatively low profit margins (Busch and Bain, 2004: 331) and the concentration ratio of the food retail industry encourages an "economy of quality" (Konefal et al., 2005: 292). While price remains important, supermarkets increasingly compete on quality, driving growth in assurance schemes (Konefal et al., 2005). Private standards are also an effective tool to reduce transaction costs (Bingen and Siyengo, 2002), an attractive opportunity given this area's low profit margins.

From the 1990s onwards, the private sector adopted and disseminated a "cascade of codes" (Kolk and van Tulder, 2005: 7) resulting in supermarkets exerting significant control over agri-food supply chains via private standards (Burch et al., 2012; Burch and Lawrence, 2007). As supermarkets expanded in size and scope over the 1990s, they began to surpass food processing companies in terms of market power, leading to them climbing 'up' the supply chain into the realm of food processing and moving into the production of 'own-brand' products (Busch and Bain, 2004). The downside of this is that the supermarket itself becomes directly responsible for the success of a product, further increasing the need for quality assurance schemes. Alongside organisations concerned with globalisation (Blowfield, 1999; Murray and Reynolds, 2000) and the rise of ethical consumerism (Busch, 2011), supermarkets began differentiating themselves through ethical positioning and social responsibility initiatives. Private standards were an ideal tool for this. Supermarkets, increasingly eager for less top-down regulation, and a positive public image to encourage consumer loyalty, were happy to present themselves as the quicker, more efficient option for regulation and standard setting (Fuchs and Kalfagianni, 2010). Thus, private standards and associated auditing can be seen as a key aspect of the post-productivist shift as they alter the focus of farming practice from exclusively productivist values and towards whatever practices are required for farmers to meet said standards or audit requirements (Rosin, 2008: 45). However, the costs and benefits of meeting these private environmental standards are not evenly shared, as participant 24 cynically noted:

"the farmer is responsible for everything that loses money, and they're [corporations] responsible for everything that makes money."

The costs of meeting environmental standards predominantly fall on the farmer and can be especially onerous for small operations, while the benefits of higher standards accrue to the

supermarkets. The reporting requirements of the standards can also include a significant workload:

"[retailers] want carbon counting and that sort of stuff. I don't disagree because it improves farm efficiency but there are 62 different carbon counting systems and my team here…I'm just looking for an environmental manager for the bloody place at the moment, trying to find somebody who can take all that stuff on because I'm sick of it." (P17)

"So, whatever aspect of the business you look at, I'm faced with a huge amount of audit, compliance, bureaucracy. I think last year, I had someone in a hi-vis jacket virtually once a month looking at something… do it all myself. It's horrendous. I'm getting to the stage where I can't cope with it. I need to employ somebody, but there's no money to pay them. I really could do with a part-time person in here just on compliance. Because I get spot audits all the time from my factory, and traceability checks and they expect instant answers on some very technical questions…I've got to stop whatever I'm doing and deal with it instantly. I suppose I spend 20% or 25% of my working day on compliance." (P31)

Even if private standards are technically voluntary, they are often practically mandatory given the dominance of supermarkets in the food retail sector (Busch, 2000). Busch and Bain illustrated this particularly clearly: "private regulation relies on the market for its enforcement. Put differently, commodities that do not meet the private standards are not bought, or are bought at sharply discounted prices. Thus, not meeting the private standards is often tantamount to bankruptcy" (2004: 335; see also Campbell et al., 2012; Campbell, 2013). Often supermarkets will attempt to harmonise their codes and/or endorse the same ones – the UK has done this via the British Retail Consortium, or the Red Tractor Scheme, for example. Reducing the range of standards can be helpful for farmers in some ways (Richards et al., 2013) but it also further ensures that said standards are essentially mandatory (Fuchs et al., 2009). Farmers are also frequently expected to take on the costs of third-party auditing and/or invest in the technology required to monitor their compliance with these schemes (McCullogh et al., 2008).

One issue with private standards is low "input legitimacy" due to opaque, unaccountable decision making (Fuchs and Kalfagianni, 2010: 73; Konefal et al., 2005), unlike public policy. They also lack clear criteria for success, raising concerns about "output legitimacy" (Fuchs and Kalfagianni, 2010). Whilst we focus on English farming, this issue is particularly problematic on the global scale, with international standards being heavily biased towards

Global North countries (Blowfield, 1999; Friedberg, 2007) and producers in the Global South facing significantly more barriers to entry (Henson and Humphrey, 2009). Private standards have not been as positive for the environment as retailers portray (Fuchs and Kalfagianni, 2010) and can be actively harmful for the global agriculture's social sustainability (Fuchs et al., 2009). Interviewees also pointed out that when standards are set from above by supermarket buyers, welfare and environmental decisions are rarely made by farmers themselves:

"*But the problem is we are getting told or we are getting advised by people, especially the hens, by people that have no experience. They have learnt it all out of a book. They are coming to tell us what to do. We have BEIC [British Egg Industry Council] people coming. We have got Freedom Food people coming. We've got people from supermarkets coming, all telling us what to do*." (P27)

Negating on the ground realities risks a limited understanding of best practice and potential costs to farmers and, importantly, means that farmer-led improvements can be ignored if they don't meet marketing priorities:

"*Probably 2005, 2006ish, I was…saying, 'Look, you need to be into tree planting, it's brilliantly beneficial for poultry, they do better, there's less mortality, they have better feather cover, for free range birds it's what you need to be doing.' Their argument to me was, 'Yeah, prove it.' because I was going to charge them more money for their eggs. So, 'Prove it.'*" (P17)

A fundamental imbalance is shown here, between farmer knowledge and expertise and the retailers' authority, where the corporation can demand proof from the supplier, but not the other way around. This outlines another consequence of private standard setting by supermarkets; the erasure of practical, local knowledge (Friedberg, 2007). Thompson and Lockie summarise this issue succinctly by arguing that "debates about the impact and legitimacy of private food standards are essentially debates about knowledge, truth, and power" (2012: 379). Retailers can demand a substantial amount of information from farms regarding their production process, including conducting (either directly or by third parties) audits which undermine a level of trust in the farmer (Tsoukas, 1997) and then can use this information to dictate farm practice. As Friedberg argues, corporations can utilise this information to begin "seeing like a state", stripping agri-food systems of cultural context (2007).

This represents a significant democratic deficit. Supermarkets can audit and exert control 'up' the supply chain and onto farms themselves, but farmers are unable to travel 'down' the supply chain by lending their input into these schemes in any significant way (Konefal et al., 2005: 299). Increasingly privatised governance raises serious concerns about the potential for food systems governed by "contemporary supermarket statecraft" (Friedberg, 2007: 322). When states devolve standard setting to food retailers, their structural and discursive power is reinforced (Fuchs and Kalfagianni, 2010) outlining how exceptional market power can translate into regulatory power (Richards et al., 2013).

4.5 Supermarket influence on policy

Alongside emphasising the power of supermarkets in driving farm practices directly, interviewees also stressed their perception of supermarkets' power in setting the policy agenda. As participant 24 described:

"I did once appear in front of the DEFRA Committee, many years ago… But privately, after we'd all made our presentations on what we found was wrong, one of the old boys, who was an MP, said to me, "We know how to fix this, but we can't do it, because the supermarkets are too powerful."

Supermarkets' standing in the economy gives them significant clout in policy and regulatory making discussions (Clapp, 2021: 406). Innes (2021) argues that the British state has uniquely close ties with business, avoiding intervention in the private sector but enabling ever greater corporate access to public authority. The Food Strategy Advisory Board, for example, only has one farmer on board, compared to nine CEOs, including the CEO of Sainsbury's (LWA, 2025).

The UK has some of the weakest lobbying regulation in the world, with little transparency about corporate access to government (Crepaz and Worthy, 2024). An investigation by The Food Foundation (2025) stated that "the extent to which endemic power imbalances within the food system are warping democratic processes and hampering the ability of governments to intervene in support of people and planet is now a serious cause for concern". Furthermore, supermarkets influence public opinion and debate through their role in sponsoring research, including research which goes on to inform policy (Clapp, 2021: 406). Farmers perceive this power imbalance in policy making, for example:

"The government have backed the supermarkets to keep food cheap. They've let the supermarkets rule the job." (P25)

5. Discussion and Conclusion

Interviewees saw supermarkets as a key driver of agrarian change in the UK, with a range of pressures that represent a "hybrid position" between productivism and post-productivism, as identified by Beacham et al. (2023). Shifts towards pluriactivity and diversified income streams were expressed as (often reluctant) responses to reduced income, with diversifications and off farm incomes even expressed as 'subsidising' supermarkets:

"Why should we have to do other parts of a business to subsidise retailers? We don't get paid enough by the retailers as it trickles down, so therefore why should we bother? Why should I have to work even harder and stretch my skill base even further?" (P30)

"distorting the market, going back to agricultural subsidy, always has unintended consequences. Because very little of that money – I'd probably say very little of that money, if any of it – actually goes into your farmer's pocket. It goes into the books, but it just leads to inefficiencies that consume that money. It goes into the industry, and I think it probably helps keep the cost of food down, but I'm actually convinced it doesn't end up in farmers' pockets. In other words, if you never had a subsidy system at all to start with, you'd have a different agricultural picture out there, but farmers wouldn't be any worse off because of it." (P39)

This feeling of farmers subsidising retailers is supported by empirical data. Taverner (2025) shows that despite increases in sector productivity, farm gate prices have decreased in real terms since the 1980s. He attributes this change to global market pressure, and the increasing power of corporations as price-setters in the UK. The post-productivist reduction of inputs by farmers exemplifies this 'subsidy' as cost savings and environmental benefits are passed on to retailers. Meanwhile, price pressures drive productivist intensification, farm expansion, and declines in some environmental and welfare standards. While practice can be altered by standard setting, retailers often gain at farmers' expense. Interviewees expressed frustration at the political lobbying power of corporations, specifically how the government "*let the supermarkets rule the job"* (P25) and felt they were "*fighting an unequal fight*" (P11) when it came to supermarket power.

The (post-)productivism literature makes little mention of wider corporate dominance in agri-food supply chains, despite its critiques of top-down, structuralist perspectives (Marsden et

al., 1993: 2 0; Wilson, 2001: 85-86). Some work – e.g. Jacks (2007) – has explored corporate influence within agricultural systems, including drawing on post-productivism as a term, but this work does not take a critical approach to the term and occurs within the field of accounting rather than agrarian/rural studies. Whilst Potter and Tilzey (2008) note the omission of social relations and forms of production within the post-productivist debate and some publications (e.g. Burch and Lawrence, 2005) mention both productivism and supermarkets, this is not done in a way that directly intervenes in the post-productivist literature gap. Although a significant body of literature on the impact of corporate control on agri-food systems was published during the (post-)productivist 'heyday' (e.g. Marsden, 1998; Wilkinson, 2002) this was never integrated into the post-productivist literature. We argue that this gap should be filled, as a focus on supermarket power is vital for understanding agrarian changes.

From a policy perspective, the SFI has faced criticism for displaying a failure to understand the reasons why environmentally damaging farming practices occur; it is not for a lack of care but because, for food production to be profitable, damaging farming practices become essentially mandatory (Heron et al., 2023). Ultimately, whilst the SFI can be framed as payment for more environmentally friendly farming practices, its voluntary nature allows farmers to continue damaging practices so long as their bottom line is not harmed by 'lost' SFI income. It may be more financially productive for some farmers to continue with harmful practices (Attorp and Hubbard, 2023), particularly if they are too small or too large for the subsidy to have a meaningful economic effect: this is especially worrying given the trend of increasing farm size. There is also the risk that any financial input to farms is taken into consideration in supermarket price setting, making SFI payments effectively just another subsidy for low farm-gate prices.

Both ELMS and its legislative enabler, the 2020 Agriculture Act, ignore the price pressures on farmers that render nature prioritisation difficult. Reforms to the GCA, requested by farmers in 2023, could create space for meaningful impact on farm environmental performance, yet these potentials are largely ignored in public policy debate. Even food-specific government publications such as the government's food strategy (DEFRA, 2025d) centre business and market profitability as food systems saviours (LWA, 2025), despite farmers' fears that any extra profitability would quickly be eaten up by supermarket price pressures.

By focusing on opening UK agriculture up to the global free market, post-Brexit agricultural policy further destabilises the food system and makes no significant regime change (Frank et al., 2024). Much of the rhetoric around Brexit was about "taking back control" (Gravey, 2022), but the reality of post-Brexit agricultural policy is that it largely consists of relinquishing control to the market: and thus, considering their control of the market, the supermarkets (and internationally domiciled agricultural input and trading firms). Besides the ASCA and GCA, which appear relatively toothless, there is no meaningful will to curb supermarket power over UK farming. While ELMS acknowledges the underproduction of environmental goods as a market failure, responsibility for addressing (and paying for) this failure is delegated to the state—in a manner that leaves the broader market framework unchallenged. Furthermore, the definition of "public goods" also remains sufficiently vague, allowing for a "depoliticising consensus frame", obfuscating meaningful political change (Coulson and Milbourne, 2022).

The political power of supermarkets presents a potential reason for this weak regulation of corporate market capture: the UK's weak lobbying rules and lack of transparency (Crepaz and Worthy, 2023) make rigorous academic analysis of this relationship difficult. This is likely why the productivism to post-productivism research has historically focused on policy changes which are more readily available for analysis. Concerningly, recent moves in the UK supermarket sector have decreased transparency even further: ASDA and Morrisons, half of the big four, were bought by private equity firms in 2020 and 2021 respectively. This means they no longer have the reporting commitments of publicly traded corporations. Available information, however, suggests both supermarkets are struggling with debt under private equity management (Onita and Heal, 2025), which does not bode well for potential price pressures on their suppliers.

This lack of transparency in the supply chain means it is vital that academics listen to farmer voices. We'd like to end by reiterating the calls of Beacham et al. (2023) and MacMillan and Benton (2014) that farmers' voices and real-world experiences should be centred in rural and agrarian studies research. Without significant democratisation in the future to ensure supply chain information is more transparently accessible, this is our most important source for understanding trends in the global food system.

References

AHDB (Agriculture and Horticulture Development Board) (2022) High prices but high fertiliser cost, 11 March 2022. https://ahdb.org.uk/news/high-prices-but-high-fertiliser-cost-grain-market-daily Accessed 8/12/25

AHDB (2023) Average farm milk production grows despite continued loss of dairy farms, 11 May 2023. https://ahdb.org.uk/news/average-farm-milk-production-grows-despite-continued-loss-of-dairy-farms Accessed 8/12/25

Arla (2024) *Annual Report 2024* https://www.arla.com/company/investor/annual-reports/ Accessed 25/10/25

Arla (2025) McDonald's teams up with Arla Foods https://news.arlafoods.co.uk/press-releases/77625fb6-8758-4fdc-abec-71d77e6708a6/mcdonald-s-teams-up-with-arla-foods Accessed 8/12/25

Attorp, A., Hubbard, C. (2023) Governing the UK agri-food system post-Brexit., in, Attorp, A., Heron, S., McAreavey, R. (eds.) *Rural Governance in the UK: Towards a Sustainable and Equitable Society* (Routledge)

Baker, J. (2024) Environmental land management in 2024: details of actions and payments, DEFRA Blog, https://defrafarming.blog.gov.uk/2024/01/04/environmental-land-management-in-2024-details-of-actions-and-payments/ Accessed 12/8/24

Barlow, H., Lostak, M. (2023) Retailer and grower relationships and the supply chain pressures in English horticulture: The lived experience, *Journal of Rural Studies* (102:11)

Beacham, J D., Jackson, P., Jaworski, C C., Krzywoszynska, A., Dicks, L V. (2023) Contextualising farmer perspectives on regenerative agriculture: A post-productivist future? *Journal of Rural Studies* (102)

Bingen, J., Siyengo, A. (2002) Standards and corporate reconstruction in the Michigan dry bean industry, *Agriculture and Human Values* (19:4)

Blowfield, M. (1999) Ethical trade: a review of developments and issues, *Third World Quarterly* (20:4)

Boisson, J-M, Buller, H. (1996) France, in, Whitby, M. (ed.) *The European Environment and CAP Reform: Policies and Prospects for Conservation* (CABI)

Buller, H., Wilson, G A., Holl, A. (2000) *Agri-environmental Policy in the European Union* (Routledge)

Burch, D., Dixon, J., Lawrence, G. (2012) Introduction to symposium on the changing role of supermarkets in global supply chains: from seedling to supermarket: agri-food supply chains in transition, *Agriculture and Human Values* (30)

Burch, D., Lawrence, G. (2005) Supermarket own brands, supply chains and the transformation of the agri-food system, *International Journal of Sociology of Agriculture and Food* (13:1)

Burch, D., Lawrence, G. (2007) *Supermarkets and Agri-Food Supply Chains: Transformations in the production and consumption of foods* (Edward Elgar)

Burton, R J F., Paragahawewa, U H. (2011) Creating culturally sustainable agri-environmental schemes, *Journal of Rural Studies* (27)

Busch, L. (2000) The moral economy of grades and standards, *Journal of Rural Studies* (16:3)

Busch, L. (2011) The private governance of food: equitable exchange or bizarre bazaar?, *Agriculture and Human Values* (28)

Busch, L., Bain, C. (2004) New! Improved? The Transformation of the Global Agrifood System, *Rural Sociology* (69:3)

Campbell, H. (2013) Food and the audit society, in, Murcott, A., Belasco, W., Jackson, P. (eds.) *The Handbook of Food Research* (Bloomsbury Publishing)

Campbell, H., Rosin, C., Hunt, L., Fairweather, J. (2012) The social practice of sustainable agriculture under audit discipline: Initial insights from the ARGOS project in New Zealand, *Journal of Rural Studies* (28:1)

Case, P. (2013) Calls to stop exploitative supermarket middlemen, *Farmers Weekly*, 25 June 2013. https://www.fwi.co.uk/business/calls-to-stop-exploitative-supermarket-middlemen Accessed 25/10/25

Case, P. (2023) Upland farms face 37% funding hole under ELM, warns NFU. *Farmers Weekly*, 21 November 2023. https://www.fwi.co.uk/business/business-management/agricultural-transition/upland-farms-face-37-funding-hole-under-elm-warns-nfu Accessed 8/12/25

CIWA (Compassion in World Farming) (2025) Factory farming map. https://www.ciwf.org.uk/our-campaigns/end-it/factory-farming-map/ Accessed 8/12/25

Clapp, J. (2021) The problem with growing corporate concentration and power in the global food system, *Nature Food* (2)

Clapp, J. (2022) The rise of big food and agriculture: corporate influence in the food system, in, Sage, C (ed.) *A research agenda for food systems* (Edward Elgar)

Clark, B., Proctor, A., Boaitey, A., Mahon, N., Hanley, N., Holloway, L. (2024) Animal health and welfare as a public good: what do the public think? *Agriculture and Human Values* (41)

Coulson, H., Milbourne, P. (2022) Agriculture, food and land: Struggles for UK post-Brexit agri-food justice, *Geoforum* (131)

CPRE (Campaign to Protect Rural England) (2017) Uncertain harvest: does the loss of farms matter? CPREZUncertainZHarvest.pdf Accessed 8/12/25

Crepaz, M., Worthy, B. (2024) Cleaning up UK Politics: What would better lobbying regulation look like? *Parliamentary Affairs* (77:3)

Cusworth G., Dodsworth, J. (2021) Using the 'good farmer' concept to explore agricultural attitudes to the provision of public goods. A case study of participants in an English agri-environmental scheme, *Agriculture and Human Values* (38)

Danielle, A. (2025) UK Grocery Market Share 2025. *Grocery Trade News*, 5 November 2025. https://www.grocerytradenews.com/uk-grocery-market-share-2025/ Accessed 8/12/25

DEFRA (Department for Environment, Farming and Rural Affairs) (2023) Nature markets: A framework for scaling up private investment in nature recovery and sustainable farming,

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/642542ae60a35e000c0cb148/nature-markets.pdf Accessed 12/8/25

DEFRA (2024) Advancing work on supply chain fairness, *DEFRA Farming Blog*, https://defrafarming.blog.gov.uk/2024/11/21/advancing-work-on-supply-chain-fairness/ Accessed 25/10/25

DEFRA (2025a) Farming evidence: key statistics. https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/farming-evidence-pack-a-high-level-overview-of-the-uk-agricultural-industry/farming-evidence-key-statistics-accessible-version Accessed 8/12/25

DEFRA (2025b) Farm Business Income by type of farm in England 2023/24, https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/farm-business-income/farm-business-income-by-type-of-farm-in-england-202324#farm-business-income-by-cost-centre Accessed 24/07/25

DEFRA (2025c) Contact ASCA in confidence or make a formal complaint, https://www.gov.uk/guidance/contact-asca-in-confidence-or-make-a-formal-complaint Accessed 25/10/25

DEFRA (2025d) A UK government food strategy for England, considering the wider UK food system, A UK government food strategy for England, considering the wider UK food system - GOV.UK Accessed 12/8/25

Dobson, P.W. (2004) Exploiting buyer power: lessons from the British grocery trade, *Antitrust LJ* (*72*)

Evans, N., Morris, C., Winter, M. (2002) Conceptualizing agriculture: a critique of post-productivism as the new orthodoxy, *Progress in Human Geography* (26:3)

Food Foundation, The (2025) Corporate lobbying: the dark side of the plate. https://foodfoundation.org.uk/publication/corporate-lobbying-dark-side-plate Accessed 8/12/25

FSA (Food Standards Agency) (2022) Our Food 2021: An annual review of food standards across the UK. https://www.food.gov.uk/our-work/annualreviewoffoodstandards2021 Accessed 8/12/25

Frank, L., Feola, G., Schape, N. (2024) Assessing regime destabilisation through policy change: An analysis of agricultural policy in the United Kingdom during Brexit, *Environmental Innovation and Societal Transitions* (50)

Frascarelli, A. (2024) The evolution of policy instruments for European rural development, *Italian Review of Agricultural Economics* (79:3)

Friedberg, S. (2007) Supermarkets and imperial knowledge, *Cultural Geographies* (14:3)

Friends of the Earth (2019) There's something wrong in the countryside: rising pesticide use in the UK. https://policy.friendsoftheearth.uk/print/pdf/node/119 Accessed 8/12/25

Fuchs, D., Kalfagianni, A. (2010) The Democratic Legitimacy of Private Authority in the Food Chain, in, Porter, T., Ronit, K. (eds.) *The Challenges of Global Business Authority: Democratic Renewal, Stalemate, or Decay?* (Suny Press)

Fuchs, D., Kalfagianni, A., Arentsen, M. (2009) Retail Power, Private Standards, and Sustainability in the Global Food System, in, Clapp, J., Fuchs, D. (eds.) *Corporate Power in Global Agrifood Governance* (MIT Press)

GCA (Groceries Code Adjudicator) (2024) Annual Report and Accounts: Improving fairness for suppliers, https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/66a8feeaab418ab055592fe3/GCA_Annual_Report_and_Accounts_2023-24__web_.pdf Accessed 25/10/25

Glaser, B., Strauss, A. (2017) *Discovery of grounded theory: Strategies for qualitative research* (Routledge)

Gorecki, P K. (2009) A Code of Practice for Grocery Goods Undertakings and an Ombudsman: How to Do a Lot of Harm by Trying to Do a Little Good, *The Economic and Social Review* (40:4)

Goyal, M., Hickel, J., Jha, P. (2025) Increasing inequality in agri-food value chains: global trends from 1995-2020, *Global Food Security* (46)

Gravey, V. (2022) Brexit and the Common Agricultural Policy: There and Back Again, in, Antonopoulos, I., Bell, M., Čavošk, A., Petetin, L. (eds.) *The Governance of Agriculture in Post-Brexit UK* (Routledge)

Greenberg, S. (2017) Corporate power in the agro-food system and the consumer food environment in South Africa, *The Journal of Peasant Studies (44:*2)

Halfacree K. (1999) A new space or spatial effacement? Alternative futures for the post-productivist countryside, in, Walford, N., Everitt, J C., Napton, D E. (eds.) *Reshaping the Countryside: Perceptions of Processes of Rural Change* (CABI)

Halfacree, K. (1997) Contrasting roles for the post-productivist countryside, in, Cloke, P,. Little, J. (eds.) *Contested Countryside Cultures* (Routledge)

Hamlett, J., Alexander, A., Bailey, A.R., Shaw, G. (2008) Regulating UK supermarkets: an oral-history perspective, *History and Policy*, https://historyandpolicy.org/policy-papers/papers/regulating-uk-supermarkets-an-oral-history-perspective/ Accessed 8/12/25

Hart, K., Wilson, G A. (1998) UK Implementation of Agri-environment Regulation 2078/92/EEC: enthusiastic supporter or reluctant participant? *Landscape Research* (23:3)

Hasnain, S., Ingram, J., Zurek, M. (2020) *Mapping the UK Food System – A report for the UKRI Transforming UK Food Systems Programme*, University of Oxford, Environmental Change Institute, https://www.eci.ox.ac.uk/sites/default/files/2022-05/Mapping-the-UK-food-system-digital.pdf Accessed 25/10/25

Henson, S., Humphrey, J. (2009) *The Impacts of Private Food Safety Standards on the Food Chain and on Public Standard-Setting Processes*, Paper prepared for FAO/WHO, https://www.fao.org/4/i1132e/i1132e00.pdf Accessed 28/7/25

Heron, K., Heffron, A., Booth, R. (2023) You can't eat profits: A democratic vision for England's tormented farmlands, *The New Statesman*, https://www.newstatesman.com/ideas/2023/04/eat-profits-england-food-system-focused-over-sustainability-new-scheme Accessed 8/8/25

Hingley, M K. (2005) Power Imbalance in UK Agri-Food Supply Channels: Learning to Live with the Supermarkets? *Journal of Marketing Management* (21:1-2)

Hurst, B., Macguire, R., Johnson, H. (2024) Submission to Independent Review of the Food and Grocery Code of Conduct 2023-24, *Centre for Decent Work and Industry*,

https://treasury.gov.au/sites/default/files/2024-06/c2024-489934-qut-centre-for-decent-work-and-industry.pdf Accessed12/12/25

Ilbery, B., Bowler, I. (1998) From agricultural productivism to post-productivism, in, Ilbery, B. (eds.) *The Geography of Rural Change* (Routledge)

Innes, A (2021) Corporate state capture: the degree to which the British state is porous to business interests is exceptional among established democracies. *LSE Politics and Policy Blog*, 16 April 2021. https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/politicsandpolicy/corporate-state-capture/ Accessed 10/12/25

Jack, L. (2007) Accounting, post-productivism and corporate power in UK food and agriculture, *Critical Perspectives on Accounting* (18)

Kam, H., Smith, H., Potter, C. (2023) Public money for public goods: the role of ideas in driving agriculture policy in the EU and post-Brexit UK, *Land Use Policy* (129)

Kolk, A., van Tulder, R. (2004) Setting new global rules? TNCs and codes of conduct, *Transnational Corporations* (14:3)

Konefal, J., Mascarenhas, M., Hatanaka, M. (2005) Governance in the global agro-food system: Backlighting the role of transnational supermarket chains, *Agriculture and Human Values* (22)

Leitschuh, B., Stewart, W P., van Riper, C J. (2022) Place-making in the Corn Belt: The productivist landscapes of the "good farmer", *Journal of Rural Studies* (92)

Little, R., Lyon, J., Tsouvalis, J. (2023) The co-design of post-Brexit and agri-environmental policy – focusing on environmental land management in England, in, Attorp, A., Heron, S., McAreavey, R. (eds.) *Rural Governance in the UK: Towards a Sustainable and Equitable Society* (Routledge)

Lobley, M., Potter, C. (1998) Environmental stewardship in UK agriculture: a comparison of the Environmentally Sensitive Area Programme and the Countryside Stewardship Scheme in south east England, *Geoforum* (29:4)

Lowe, P., Cox, G., MacEwen, M., O'Riordan, T., Winter, P. (1986) *Countryside Conflicts: the politics of farming, forestry and conservation* (Gower)

Lowe, P., Murdoch, J., Marsden, T., Munton, R., Flynn, A. (1993) Regulating the New Rural Spaces: The Uneven Development of Land, *Journal of Rural Studies* (9:3)

LWA (Landworkers' Alliance) (2025) We won't see real food system change until we put the interests of producers and consumers above those of corporations, https://landworkersalliance.org.uk/food-strategy-response-july-2025/ Accessed 8/8/25

MacMillan, T. Benton, T.G. (2014) Agriculture: Engage farmers in research, *Nature* (509:7498)

Malik, X. (2025) Debate on the Groceries Code Adjudicator. House of Commons Library Research Briefing, 28 May 2025, https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/research-briefings/cdp-2025-0114/ Accessed 8/12/25

Marsden, J., Lowe, P., Munton, R., Flynn, A. (1993) *Constructing the Countryside* (UCL Press)

Marsden, T. (1998) Economic Perspectives, in, Ilbery, B. (ed.) *The Geography of Rural Change* (Longman)

Mather, A S., Hill, G., Nijnik, M. (2006) Post-productivism and rural land use: cul de sac or challenge for theorization? *Journal of Rural Studies* (22:4)

Matthews, P G., Fish, R D., Tzanopoulos, J. (2025) Farmer identities and perceptions of public good provision, *Journal of Rural Studies* (120)

McCullogh, E., Pingali, P., Stamoulis, K. (2008) Small farms and the transformation of food systems: An overview, in, McCullough, E., Pingali, P., Stamoulis, K. (eds.) *The Transformation of Agri-Food Systems: Globalization, supply chains and smallholder farmers* (Earthscan)

Morris, C., Potter, C. (1995) Recruiting the new conservationists: farmers' adoption of agri-environmental schemes in the UK, *Journal of Rural Studies* (11)

Muirhead, B., Almås, R. (2012) The Evolution of Western Agricultural Policy since 1945, in, Almås, R., Campbell, H. (eds.) *Rethinking Agricultural Policy Regimes: Food Security, Climate Change, and the Future of Resilience of Global Agriculture* (Emerald)

Murray, D L., Raynolds, L T. (2000) Alternative trade in bananas: Obstacles and opportunities for progressive social change in the global economy, *Agriculture and Human Values* (17)

National Farmers Union (NFU) (2024) Everything you need to know about the Landscape Recovery scheme, https://www.nfuonline.com/updates-and-information/everything-you-need-to-know-about-the-landscape-recovery-scheme/ Accessed 12/8/25

NFU (2025) *Understanding the role of the Agricultural Supply Chain Adjudicator*, https://www.nfuonline.com/updates-and-information/asca-essential-information/ Accessed 25/10/25

Onita, L., Heal, A. (2025) Asda and Morrisons struggle under weight of private equity ownership. *Financial Times*, 8 March 2025. https://www.ft.com/content/0edb6ee9-8674-4f6d-87b2-69f6c28136e8 Accessed 7/12/25

Oosterveer, P. (2011) Restructuring Food Supply: Sustainability and Supermarkets, in, Spaargaren, G., Oosterveer, P., Loeber, A. (eds.) *Food Practices in Transition: Changing Food Consumption, Retail and Production in the Age of Reflexive Modernity* (Taylor and Francis)

Potter, C. (1998) *Against the Grain: Agri-Environmental Reform in the United States and the European Union* (CABI)

Potter, C., Tilzey, M. (2005) Agricultural policy discourses in the European post-Fordist transition: neoliberalism, neomercantilism and multifunctionality, *Progress in Human Geography* (29:5)

Potter, C., Tilzey, M. (2008) Productivism versus Post-Productivism? Modes of Agri-Environmental Governance in Post-Fordist Agricultural Transitions, in, Robinson, G. (ed.) *Perspectives on Rural Policy and Planning* (Ashgate)

Prior, M. (2024) More cattle kept in UK 'megafarms', BBC finds. *BBC News*, 14 August 2024. https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/cy4ldkpz1klo Accessed 8/12/25

Quinn, I. (2025) Asda vows to be 'cheapest' as it brings back Rollback prices, *The Grocer*, https://www.thegrocer.co.uk/news/asda-vows-to-be-cheapest-as-it-brings-back-rollback-prices/700447.article Accessed 25/10/25

Richards, C., Bjørkhaug, H., Lawrence, G., Hickman, E. (2013) Retailer-driven agricultural restructuring – Australia, the UK and Norway in comparison, *Agriculture and Human Values* (30)

Riley, M. (2016) How does longer term participation in agri-environment schemes [re]shape farmers' environmental dispositions and identities? *Land Use Policy* (52)

Rosin, C. (2008) The conventions of agri-environmental schemes in New Zealand: Farmers, retail driven audit schemes and a new spirit of farming, *GeoJournal* (73)

Sebastian, K. (2019) Distinguishing between the strains of grounded theory: classical, interpretive and constructivist, *Journal for Social Thought* (3)

Seth, A. Randall, G. (2020) *The Grocers: The rise and rise of the supermarket chains* (Kogan Page)

Shears, P. (2013) The Groceries Supply Code of Practice: fairness for farmers? *International Journal of Agricultural Management* (3:1)

Shucksmith, M. (1993) Farm household behaviour and the transition to post-productivism, *Journal of Agricultural Economics* (44)

Singleton, V. (2010) Good farming: Control or care?, in, Mol, A., Moser, I., Pols, J. (eds.) *Care in Practice: On tinkering in clinics, homes and farms* (Transaction)

Smith, D A. (2015) *A Complete Understanding of the Groceries Supply Code of Practice* (Making Business Matter LTD) https://www.makingbusinessmatter.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/woocommerce_uploads/2020/11/A_Complete_Understanding-20151118-1534-ES-19-11-15-y7hcxn.pdf Accessed 25/10/25

Taverner, C. (2025) *Paying the Price Cheap food, big business and the cost to farming and food security.* Food, Farming and Countryside Commission, March 2025. https://ffcc.co.uk/publications/paying-the-price Accessed 14/12/25

Thompson, L., Lockie, S. (2013) Private standards, grower networks, and power in a food supply system, *Agriculture and Human Values* (30)

Towill, D. (2005) A perspective on UK supermarket pressure on the supply chain, *European Management Journal* (23:4)

Tsoukas, H. (1997) The tyranny of light: The temptations and the paradoxes of the information society, *Futures* (29:9)

Uberoi, E. (2021) UK dairy industry statistics. House of Commons Library Number 2721, 9 September 2021.

UK Parliament Petitions (2024) Reform the Grocery Supply Code of Practice to better protect farmers, petition number 643216. https://petition.parliament.uk/archived/petitions/643216 Accessed 8/12/25

Walford, N. (2003) Productivism is allegedly dead, long live productivism. Evidence of continued productivist attitudes and decision-making in South-East England, *Journal of Rural Studies* (19)

Ward, N. (1993) The agricultural treadmill and the rural environment in the post-productivist era, *Sociologia Ruralis* (33)

Ward, N., Clark, J., Lowe, P., Seymour, S. (1998) Keeping matters in its place: pollution regulation and reconfiguration of farmers and farming, *Environment and Planning A* (30)

Whitby, M. (1996) The Prospect for Agri-environmental Policies within a Reformed CAP, in, Whitby, M., (ed.) *The European Environment and CAP Reform: Policies and Prospects for Conservation* (CAB International)

Wilkinson, J. (2002) The Final Foods Industry and the Changing Face of the Global Agro-food System, *Sociologia Ruralis* (42:4)

Wilson, G A. (1996) Farmer environmental attitudes and ESA participation, *Geoforum* (27:2)

Wilson, G A. (1997) Assessing the environmental impact of the Environmentally Sensitive Areas scheme: a case for using farmers' environmental knowledge? *Landscape Research* (22:3)

Wilson, G A. (2001) From productivism to post-productivism…and Back Again? Exploring the (Un)changed Nature and Mental Landscapes of European Agriculture, *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* (26:1)

Wilson, O., Wilson, G. (1997) Common cause of common concern? The role of common lands in the post-productivist countryside, *Area* (29)

Yarwood, R., Evans, N. (1999) The Changing Geography of Rare Livestock Breeds in Britain, *Geography* (84:1)

Chapter 6: Good Care in Hard Times: The Re-Negotiation of Care amid Farm Business Expansion and Diversification in England

In the previous chapter, my co-author and I 'launched' the topic of economic contexts when understanding farmers' lived experience. In this chapter, I delve deeper into how these conditions impact the way care is (re)negotiated within farms. This chapter also acts to bring to the fore the affective components of agricultural life, in farmers' own words.

The overall motivation behind this paper was to communicate the centrality of care and its role in producing meaningful, experiential knowledge (Krzywoszynska, 2016) – a dominant theme in my interviews – alongside the changing contexts and demands farmers experience (Lobley et al., 2018; Taverner, 2025; McCain, 2025). I share the same goals as many of these 'demands' – a more just, more ethical, more environmentally friendly farming system. However, as Harbers has argued:

"*It is not a matter of condemning the individual farmer but more a matter of altering the conditions under which he has to do his job*" (2010: 165)

I found there was a disconnect between what is sought by policy and governance spheres and the economic realities within which farmers are expected to enact such change. By presenting the conditions in which farm work operates, my goal is to outline the tensions between how current 'demands' are sought by 'top-down' actors and the daily reality of English farm life.

This paper presents an original contribution to existing literature by exploring how care is re-negotiated as part of the financially-induced changes of farm business expansion and diversification. It attends to the issue of 'distance' within care ethics literature (Popke, 2006) by examining how distance mediates expressions of care within these changes. It also attends to the oversight of the daily reality of care and its affective dimensions from policy and governance spheres (Curry, 2002). This contributes to literature which makes similar calls (Singleton, 2010, 2012; Singleton and Law, 2013; Lavau and Bingham, 2017; Enticott and O'Mahony, 2024; Harbers, 2010; Solveig and Law, 2017; Freeman, 2017; McLoughlin, 2025) but within an original framing focused on expansion and diversification. What follows also contributes to scholarly understandings of how responsibility, agency, and the existence of multiple, contradictory cares interact (Law, 2010). The contradictions which emerge when

farmers must care for themselves, their farm as a business and the on-farm inhabitants are also explored.

References

Curry, J M. (2002) Care Theory and 'caring' systems of Agriculture, *Agriculture and Human Values* (19)

Enticott, G., O'Mahony, K. (2024) Feeding time(s): Patient urgence and the need for careful temporalities of antimicrobial resistance, *Environment and Planning E* (7:3)

Freeman, R. (2017) Care, policy, knowledge: Translating between worlds, *The Sociological Review* (65:2)

Harbers, J A. (2010) Animal farm love stories: About care and economy, in, Mol, A., Moser, I., Pols, J. (eds.) *Care in practice: On tinkering in clinics, homes and farms* (Transcript)

Krzywoszynska, A. (2016) What farmers know: Experiential knowledge and care in vine growing, *Sociologia Ruralis* (56:2)

Lavau, S., Bingham, N. (2017) Practices of attention, possibilities for care: Making situations matter in food safety inspection, *The Sociological Review Monographs* (65:2)

Law, J. (2010) Care and killing: Tensions in veterinary practice, in, Mol, A., Moser, I., Pols, J. (eds.) *Care in practice: On tinkering in clinics, homes and farms* (Transcript)

Lobley, M., Winter, M., Wheeler, R. (2018) *The Changing World of Farming in Brexit UK* (Taylor and Francis)

McCain (2025) Farmdex Report 2025, https://www.mccain.co.uk/media/s0wjuwhn/mccain_farmdexreport.pdf Accessed 10/12/25

McLoughlin, E. (2025) Change the world farm by farm: The moral care of audit and the paradox of animal welfare inspection in Europe, *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* (32:1)

Popke, J. (2006) Geography and Ethics: Everyday Mediations Through Care and Consumption, *Progress in Human Geography* (19:1)

Singleton, V. (2010) Good farming control or care?, in, Mol, A., Ingunn, M., Pols, J. (eds.) *Care in practice: On tinkering in clinics, homes and farms* (Transcript)

Singleton, V. (2012) When Contexts Meet: Feminism and Accountability in UK Cattle Farming, *Science, Technology and Human Values* (37:4)

Singleton, V., Law, J. (2013) Devices as rituals. Notes on enacting resistance, *Journal of Cultural Economy* (6:3)

Solveig, J., Law, J. (2017) Sámi salmon, state salmon: TEK, technoscience and care, *The Sociological Review* (65:2)

Taverner, C. (2025) Paying the Price: Cheap food, big business and the cost to farming and food security, *Food, Farming and Countryside Commission*, https://ffcc-uk.files.svdcdn.com/production/assets/downloads/FFCC_False-Economy_report_part2_v5-1.pdf?dm=1741863510 Accessed 20/12/25

Good Care in Hard Times: The Re-Negotiation of Care amid Farm Business Expansion and Diversification in England

Abstract: Agri-care literature argues that good care is an intrinsic part of good farming and that experiential knowledge developed through mundane acts of 'caring for' enable this 'good care' to flourish. Increasing demands are being placed on farmers to 'care more', but this occurs within a challenging economic context. In response to economic pressures, many farm businesses are expanding and/or diversifying. This paper examines how care is re-negotiated within these business changes, drawing on semi-structured interviews with a diverse range of English farmers. The overarching theme found is that both expansion and diversification pose risks for farmers' abilities to engage in the embodied, prosaic practice of 'caring for'. Whilst this paper finds that expansion and diversification can attend to the needs of the farm as a business and the individual farmer, it draws attention to the risks for 'good care' in contexts where those with decision-making power are distanced from the prosaic everyday reality of farming which generates responsibility. Acts of care towards the self and/or the farm business may work to uphold a problematic agri-food system where farmers' care is exploited, however, these decisions also sustain farmers who 'care about' farming to remain in the industry. The goal of this work is not to critique the intrinsic merit of demands on farmers which seek to enable more sustainable and ethical farm practice, but to outline a contradiction between expectations and economic conditions when it comes to how 'good care', and thus 'good farming', is enacted.

Key words: care ethics, experiential knowledge, responsibility, diversification, farm business expansion

1. Introduction

Agri-care literature has argued that good care is an intrinsic part of good farming (Harbers, 2010; Law, 2010; Singleton, 2010; Singleton and Law, 2013) and that experiential knowledge and acts of 'caring for' through mundane daily acts enable this 'good care' to flourish (Krzywoszynska, 2016). Civil society, government policy, and private regulations are increasingly asking English farmers to 'care more' in an effort to maintain, continue, and repair our world, to reference the classical definition of care (Fisher and Tronto, 1990: 40). Post-Brexit agricultural policy in the United Kingdom (UK) takes a 'public money for public goods' approach (Kam et al., 2023). Under this model, farmers are rewarded for supplying

public goods such as recreational areas, a healthy rural environment, lower greenhouse gas emissions, and the preservation of cultural landscapes, reflecting changing perceptions over the purpose of agriculture. This replaces the previous direct payments system and, although the total expenditure allocated remains the same, the actual value of this budget will decline in real terms (Greer and Grant, 2023).

Private governance also plays a part, with an increase in assurance schemes and private standards (Kolk and van Tulder, 2005; Busch, 2011; Campbell, 2013). These respond to rising environmental and ethical concerns held by consumers, signal corporate social responsibility and differentiate food products based on quality in a market with low profit margins (Busch, 2011; Busch and Bain, 2004; Konefal et al., 2005). The overarching ethos behind these developments should not be disregarded: agriculture makes up approximately ten per cent of both UK and global greenhouse gas emissions; UK biodiversity is significantly depleted; climate change requires adaptation and mitigation through changes in land management; and improved farm animal welfare is found to result in both private and public benefits (Clark et al., 2024; Wentworth and Plumpton, 2019; Burns et al., 2023).

However, these demands occur within a wider agri-capitalist system that improperly values food as a commodity and within an economic context which is particularly difficult for English farmers at present (Coulson and Milbourne, 2022; Taverner, 2025; McCain, 2025). The UK agricultural sector has long faced financial insecurity, marked by declining real incomes, uneven profit margins, and limited pricing power within an agri-food system dominated by corporate actors (Burch and Lawrence, 2007; Campbell, 2013; Clapp and Fuchs, 2009; The Food Foundation, 2025; Seth and Randell, 2020; Jack and Hammans, 2022). Despite productivity gains, many (particularly smaller) farms remain structurally vulnerable as price and contract takers (Barlow and Lostak, 2023). Concerns about long-term farm viability persist (Hubbard et al., 2018), with Franks (2022) drawing on 2021 data to estimate that 25-33% of UK farmers could not remain without major income changes, with higher risk among mixed and grazing farms. The daily reality of care and its affective dimensions often render it overlooked within policy and governance spheres (Curry, 2002). This paper contributes to a growing body of scholarship seeking to address this oversight by outlining the tensions between expectations that farmers ‘care more’ and the political-economic conditions that shape how ‘good care’ is enacted (Singleton, 2010, 2012; Singleton and Law, 2013; Lavau and Bingham, 2017; Enticott and O’Mahony, 2024; Harbers, 2010; Solveig and Law, 2017; Freeman, 2017; McLoughlin, 2025).

Within this economic context, expansion and diversification are key ways farmers are adapting and restructuring their businesses. In this paper, expansion refers to two forms of 'scaling up' within a farm business. The first is spatial expansion, meaning an increase in the total area of land farmed. There is already a trend towards fewer but larger farms (de Roest et al., 2017; Zimmermann and Heckelei, 2012) with the total number of farms in the UK decreasing by close to a third between 1985 and 2016 and 19% of farms now managing 74% of UK land (Lobley et al., 2018: 45, 47). Current data shows the number of small farms in the UK to be on the decline, especially those under 200 hectares (ha) (CPRE, 2017). The second is organisational expansion, referring to growth in the scale of the farm business that does not necessarily involve additional land – for example, increasing herd size within the same land area or expanding the agricultural workload (a form of "redeployment of resources into new agricultural enterprises" – Lobley et al., 2018: 46). Often, but not always, these types of expansion occur simultaneously, hence why they are considered together under the concept of expansion.

This definition overlaps with certain forms of agricultural intensification, such as increasing herd size on the same area of land, but does not encompass all intensification strategies (for example, increasing milk yield within a herd of the same size). As the focus of this paper is on farmers' experiences rather than on measuring livestock welfare or ecological outcomes, the concept of farm business expansion is used instead of intensification. Discussions of agricultural restructuring have often heavily focused on literal farm size (see Lobley et al., 2018: 46), this concept of expansion seeks to infuse further nuance into this whilst retaining a focus on farmer experiences of their work. High costs of land, geographical nuances, tenancy access, and the complex reality of running larger farms makes expansion on a spatial level undesirable to some farm types (Franks, 2009). 'Scaling up' the farm business through organisational expansion rather than exclusively spatial expansion is therefore a potential way to improve farm business income depending on the nuances of farm structures. The total labour used on farms has reduced over time – this is related to a number of factors, see Lobley et al. (2018: 53-56) for details – but the drive to minimise costs is a core component, with reports of farmers undertaking long working hours in order to support their business' viability (Lobley et al., 2018: 55; McCain, 2025). Diversification is defined as "non-agricultural work of an entrepreneurial nature on- or off-farm but which utilises farm resources", with 72% of farm businesses in England having engaged in diversification, a ten per cent increase from 2015/16 (DEFRA, 2026).

Drawing on 41 interviews with a diverse range of farmers across England, this research finds that, whilst interviewees show strong affective ties to their work, the contexts where embodied 'caring for' can be enacted risk erosion under rising levels of expansion and/or diversification. Decisions to expand and/or diversify often work to both sustain and resist a problematic agri-food system and the presence of "multiple cares", including care for the self, is clear (Law, 2010). Care is not automatically absent in these contexts, but it is renegotiated. Distance between those who 'care for' and those who occupy decision-making roles is found to be furthered within farm businesses that are larger on an operational level. This is important when responsibility is understood to be generated through 'touch' and prosaic acts (Singleton, 2012).

2. Theoretical Framework

Care ethics is grounded in relational ontology, foregrounding an understanding of the world as something inherently interdependent (Raghuram et al., 2009), where reality and subjectivity unfold symbiotically (Curry, 2002: 121; Groenhout, 2004). Care ethics sees care as a set of practices infused with values (Tronto, 2015) which involves both emotion and reason (Held, 2005). A common definition provided by Fisher and Tronto defines care:

"as a species activity that includes everything that we do to maintain, continue, and repair our 'world' so that we can live in it as well as possible. That world includes our bodies, our selves, and our environment, all of which we seek to interweave in a complex, life-sustaining web" (1990: 40)

Tronto later developed this definition to include four phases of caring (1993), later adding a fifth phase (2013). These phases are as follows: (1) Caring about – "noting the existence of a need and making an assessment that this need should be met" (1993: 106); (2) Taking care of – "assuming some responsibility for the identified need and determining how to respond" (1993: 106); (3) Care giving and (4) care receiving which emphasise the impact care will have on those involved; and (5) Caring with, where care is a reciprocal arrangement (2013). Tronto identifies attentiveness, responsibility, competence (of the care giver) and responsiveness in how the care is received (1993: 134).

Particularly relevant for this article is the distinction present in these phases between caring *about* and caring *for* (Milligan and Wiles, 2010: 741; Raghuram et al., 2009: 6). Caring about refers to the affective and emotional qualities present in care, where being affected by others enables one to become attentive and response-able to their needs (Cusworth, 2023: 62).

Caring for is the embodied practice of care, encompassing "processes of material, 'inter-corporeal' exchange between the various lifeforms" (West et al., 2018: 35). These categories are not wholly separate, although one can occur in the absence of the other (Cusworth, 2023: 71). The relational nature of care means that all parties are impacted by it, making it important to consider not just the effect of care on the receiver, but also what the care-provider may gain: "new perspective, a sense of pride or satisfaction, learning new skills or developing a vocation, a sense of power, or alleviation of guilt" (Milligan and Wiles, 2010: 737).

There are multiple dimensions of 'distance' which shape care, something Milligan and Wiles group under the notion of 'proximity' (2010). Care can be troubled by spatial distance, but this is not uniformly the case and physical closeness does not equate to the existence of care (Cusworth, 2023). Care can be delayed and/or reciprocated across time e.g., within intergenerational relations where care provided in childhood is often reciprocated later in life. Social and/or emotional proximity are also factors which can create or close the 'distance' across which care may, or may not, travel (Brown, 2003: 835). The complex ways care can be troubled by proximal forms have been dubbed 'distance-decay' issues within literature (Cusworth, 2023).

'Distance-decay' has been discussed in terms of how relations of care appear "necessarily partial and situational, holding only for those with whom we have some immediate contact and familiarity" (Popke, 2006: 507). Emotional proximity is also a mediating factor within care, and can also work to create, or close, distance. The 'caring about' and 'caring for' qualities of care respond differently to spatial divides. 'Caring about' is often easier across distance than the practical reality of 'caring for' (Grant et al., 2004; Milligan and Wiles, 2010). How boundaries of care may be "stretched" beyond immediate proximity or familiarity has seen considerable discussion within care ethics literature (Bartos, 2019; Tronto, 1993; Smith, 1998). Popke (2006) places strategies to overcome this distance into two categories; those which "infuse the quotidian and ethical merits of care into political concepts, policies, and private/public governance mechanisms" and "efforts that emphasise the ties that link distant actors together" (Cusworth, 2023: 70). Simply put, these categories can be understood to mean (1) advocating for the value of everyday, embodied acts of care to be embedded within more abstract circles concerned with collective governance, and (2) articulating the interconnectedness of life, and thus making visible the 'routes' through which care may more effectively travel.

The colloquial connotations of the word 'care' – "a missile laden with aspirations" (Rutt and Møller, 2025: 1175) – can mask its complex reality and produce overly simplistic categories which paper over the potential for negative consequences to be enacted within care (Cusworth, 2023; Ginn, 2014; Martin et al., 2015; Allen, 2001; Parr, 2003). The reality of care is understood to be a messy one (Krzywoszynska, 2019; Murphy, 2015) where tensions and conflicts often arise between subjects (Law, 2010; Mol, 2008). Care is not separate from external power relations, being historically and spatially anchored (Holloway et al., 2023; Lawson, 2007; McEwan and Goodman, 2010). Care can enable violence (Cusworth, 2023) and it is vital to consider who benefits from care, who decides how or if it should occur, and who enacts the practice 'caring for' (Martin et al., 2016). Who or what is unseen within these calculations is also of importance (Krzywoszynska, 2019).

Care as a theoretical lens has become a common feature of agrarian studies, particularly following Puig de la Bellacasa's influential works (2010, 2015, 2017). Taking Tronto's work on care ethics (2015) and combining it with the work of post-humanist scholars (Latour, 2007; Haraway, 2013), Puig de la Bellacasa's work explores the entanglements of human and non-human in the context of permaculture, foregrounding the importance of everyday acts within agri-care (2010:164). Krzywoszynska (2016) has emphasised how experiential knowledge is a key facet of agri-care, which requires attentiveness, responsiveness, and adaptation.

The importance of knowledge acquired through practical experience over time within agricultural contexts is well established within the literature (Enticott, 2012; Tsouvalis et al., 2000; Morris, 2006; Riley, 2008; Morris and Holloway, 2009). In her work, Krzywoszynska argues that experiential knowledge is "both a pre-requisite for care, and as a result of care… good care can only be delivered by those practitioners who have a situated and experiential understanding of the world of actions" (2016: 291). Krzywoszynska (2016) distinguishes experiential knowledge from rule-following, arguing that skilled practitioners respond to specific contexts, whereas beginners rely on rules in the absence of contextual understanding (see also Enticott, 2012). She emphasizes the temporal aspects of agri-care, where the ability to care well for vines is found to require cross-season engagement (2016: 298). An affective element is also required, where a skilled practitioner is able to allow themselves to be affected by the cared-about entity, becoming sensitive to their needs and wider environment. This is also explored by Puig de la Bellacasa (2015), where she notes how permaculture practitioners must "make time" to be affected by soil on multiple levels.

Place-based socio-cultural context is an important contributor to how experiential knowledge is developed and understood (West et al., 2018: 35). For example, Singleton (2012) has explored how "situated knowledges" are produced on farms and what role this knowledge plays in relation to Cattle Tracing System (CTS) legislation (Haraway, 1988). Her analysis calls for legislation, which often frames farmers as "in need of education about cattle care", to give greater consideration to the importance of located practice and the competing demands and contexts farmers' experience (2012: 415). She draws on 'touch' within farming practice as an embodied, relational, material involvement within prosaic practice which generates responsibility. Singleton's work uncovers how farmers and CTS hold contrasting perspectives on what 'good cattle care' entails, resulting in cases where farmer responsibility to cattle overrides accountability to CTS (2012: 418). Literature has identified how CTS depends on care practices on farms, whilst also 'colonising' them through regulatory control (Singleton, 2010; Singleton and Law, 2013).

Franklin et al.'s (2021) work draws on the "care multiple" perspective (Law, 2010) to, like Singleton, emphasise tensions between farmer and policy perspectives on the ideal enactment of care (see also Singleton, 2010; Shortall et al., 2017). This work, which examines farmer experiences of mandatory Nutrient Vulnerable Zone (NVZ) regulation, uncovers how such regulation can impact a farmer's ability and/or desire to be responsible for environmental outcomes. They find that rigid policy requirements, which can be difficult to enact within specific locations, can result in farmers' distancing themselves from responsibility if they feel constrained by policy. Farmers may remain invested in the overarching importance of appropriate management practices (still caring *about*) but feel unable to 'own' the outcome (as they are hindered in how to care *for*). Curry (2002) outlines how the relational reality of care is difficult to integrate into the political world, as these connections are seen as "tainted by "attachment"… compromise[ing] rational judgement" (2002: 119). Wider literature has identified that, beyond care explicitly, farmer motivations are broadly misunderstood within policy circles (Brown et al., 2021).

Centring care within agrarian studies has allowed for the contradictory aspects of care to be explored (Mincyte et al., 2025; Rutt and Møller, 2025; Martin et al., 2015). Examples of this include the co-existence of "affective ties and acts of care…alongside practices of dominance and control" (Fry et al., 2022: 234) and conflicting needs resulting in moral complexities and the privileging of some lives over others (Holloway et al., 2023). Care has been identified as capable of both resisting and upholding problematic practices, such as within industrial

agriculture (Overstreet, 2018; Singleton, 2010; Enticott and O'Mahony, 2024). Agri-care ethics takes on a range of perspectives and approaches not explored here, with the more-than-human approach being particularly prevalent (see Mincyte et al., 2025). This paper takes a human-centred approach, in line with the original research aim and design, as shall now be discussed.

3. Methods

This research draws on 41 semi-structured interviews with farmers across England, conducted in 2023. Participants were identified primarily through regional internet searches (e.g. Yellow Pages), supplemented by word-of-mouth and snowball sampling. Sampling ceased at saturation. Initial contact was made by email, telephone, or post, followed by in-person interviews lasting one to two hours. 33 interviews involved a single participant; eight included a secondary participant actively engaged in the farm business. Quotes from secondary participants are identified with an asterisk (*). Written consent was obtained from primary participants, with verbal consent from secondary participants. Ethical approval was granted by Lancaster University, and anonymity is maintained through numerical identifiers (e.g., P1, P2). When necessary, specific details (such as crop type) have been changed to ensure anonymity.

The sample was non-representative but diverse. Farm sizes ranged from under 20ha to over 100ha and included 11 mixed farms, 18 livestock farms (four mixed livestock, five beef, five dairy, two sheep, one goat, one egg production), seven arable farms and five horticultural farms. Participants ranged from their 20s to 80s and represented early-, mid-, and later-career farmers. This research focuses specifically on England because of the policy variations and cultural differences between UK nations. Geographically, interviewees were distributed across the North East (five), North West (12), Midlands (six), South East (eight), and South West (ten). Two interviews were conducted with semi-retired farmers (P4 and P41). Both were still residing on and engaged with their farms, but most farm work was contracted out.

A motivation for this research was to upend traditional knowledge flows and to centre farmers' voices (Wynne, 1996). In line with this, grounded theory was used to enable narratives and conclusions to be more co-constructed (Riley and Harvey, 2005; Glaser and Strauss, 1967). An interpretivist approach allowed prior theoretical sensitivity to inform, rather than bracket, analysis (Sebastian, 2019). I aimed to uncover farmers' motivations and their perceptions of the challenges they faced, especially in relation to recent changes in

policy direction and increasing economic pressures. Discussions were conversational and participant-led and encouraged the disclosure of "spontaneous information" (Gilbert, 2001: 126) rather than a rigid focus on assumed influences. Interviews covered preset themes: farmer history; history of the farmland and enterprise; motivations for farming and what being a farmer means to the individual; policy impact; increased focus on sustainability within farm practice; predictions for the future of farming on individual and industry-wide scales. A limitation of this grounded and open approach is that some farmers may have perspectives or experiences relevant to this paper's themes that were missed in interviews if they did not arise organically within the farmer-led discussion.

Transcripts were coded manually and using NVivo, beginning with open coding and followed by iterative rounds of advanced coding. Comparative analysis across participant characteristics was undertaken and is discussed when patterns emerged. This work aimed to enable theoretically informed, interpretive insight into how farmers understand and navigate a changing agricultural landscape, rather than statistical generalisation.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Affective ties to farm work

When discussing what being a farmer meant to them, all interviewees expressed care as a foundational motivation, although they did not all use the word directly. The primary ways these motivations were expressed were in relation to caring about: the environment (e.g. "*I wanted to save the world, so I did an environmental science degree…I might as well save the world from home*" – P37); livestock (e.g. "*they're [cows] not pets, but you know them individually, so to some extent, they become pets…cows are fascinating"* – P38); ethical food production (e.g. "*ethically, health-wise, animal welfare-wise, and the wildlife and the environment side…The decision we made was "Right, in which case, we've got to do it [food production] ourselves*" – P18); and/or the perceived duty of 'feeding the world' (e.g. "*we have a responsibility to feed people and that's why we're farmers*" – P9). The affective, emotional aspect of 'caring about' within farming was seen as a hallmark of being a farmer. One participant summed this up succinctly:

"I've never met a farmer who doesn't actually care about the environment that they work in. You know, generally people have a pride. Some people are dirty farmers. Some people are very smart and tidy farmers, but generally everyone cares." P28

Two interviewees did note that their initial reasons for farming were because of family obligations (Wicklow and Shortall, 2024). However, both these participants stressed the centrality of care in their work, with one noting that farming is about land being "*cared for*" and "*I like to see it [farming] done properly*" (P41) and the other stating *"I feel I have to protect this little oasis*" (P16*).

Interviewees expressed a rich connection to their farms, emphasising an inherent relationality to their practice. They identified, for example, "*very strong connections with the farm, with every single field, with every hedgerow, with the soil, with everything"* (P5). Farmers centred this relationship as something intrinsic to their sense of self and broader identity (Stock and Forney, 2014; Letourneau and Davidson, 2022):

"I mean, to me, [The Farm] is me. That's how one looks at it. I've been here all my life…and I intend to be here all my life…I already said where I'm going to be, when I go, and that's here." P33

"*I wouldn't say tied to the farm, you kind of get hefted to it.*" P24*

However, despite clear affective foundations, farmers stressed the challenges faced when navigating between best practice and profitability, with 31 raising the topic within interviews and 21 noting that profitability was becoming more difficult. Expansion and diversification were key ways in which interviewees were adapting to current economic challenges. How care is (re)negotiated in these contexts will now be explored.

4.2 Expansion

20 of the farmers interviewed discussed having expanded their business. 12 disclosed having acquired more land (either renting or buying) and 16 discussed expansion on an organisational level, such as increasing stock size, introducing an additional farming enterprise (e.g. egg production) or bringing previously 'inactive' land into production. There is some crossover here as some farmers talked about both of these forms. Two of the farmers, who had expanded on an organisational scale by increasing their herd size, either had already or were in the process of downsizing their stock numbers. The reasons behind this will be addressed below.

These numbers are drawn from the interview transcripts – I did not directly ask each farmer if they had expanded (in either form). This is a downside of a grounded theory approach. Four out of five dairy farmers interviewed either had already expanded or planned to, with the fifth

aiming to downsize his herd but increase yield using Automatic Milking Systems (AMS). The prevalence of expansion within the dairy farms in this research sample potentially reflects the low farmgate price for milk relative to production and overhead costs, making expansion, if possible, a way to ensure further profitability in the context of low profit margins.

Financial necessity was a key driver for all decisions to expand, for example:

"The biggest change is the financial bit, where we've had to keep chasing our tails and you've no option. You can't stand still. You've got to get bigger to keep up…It has been a case of running faster to stand still." P26 (mixed, 100+ha)

"We can't remain at 300 cows. We have to grow." P6 (dairy, 100+ha)

"How the system works and everything, I believe just as an individual small farmer, you can't survive I'm afraid. You literally cannot survive. You have to be the size to get the economy and when you are the size you can do it by yourself, you will become a business. You have to have employees and everything. Then it becomes a business to survive. It needs to grow and be together." P7 (horticulture, 100+ha)

Two farmers, both running horticultural farms over 100ha, spoke positively about the trend towards fewer, larger farms, one naming their potential contributions to both the local and national economy (P31) and the other commenting that fewer, larger farms which are well placed to not be "*affecting too many people"* are *"just common sense"* (P28). Besides these two cases, the dominant perspective on expanding farm sizes was negative, even if it was seen as necessary and desirable for financial sustainability:

"you end up with super farmers, you know, because all those little farmers who can't make money go bust, and then you get these huge conglomerates that come in and buy huge swathes of land and farm like factories" P2 (beef, 20-50ha)

"All these family businesses have suddenly become monsters. They are having to grow…There are less farmers every year, globally having to produce more and more food for more and more people…Where we're heading effectively is corporatisation of agriculture…I'm anti it because what goes with that is you are allowing big corporations to tell you what you're going to eat. I think that's scary" P6 (dairy, 100+ha)

The concerns expressed by these farmers were about shifts in power, away from networks of multiple farmers across communities and towards a smaller number of individuals. In

contrast, freedom and autonomy were noted by other interviewees as one of the most enjoyable aspects of farming:

"*This has allowed us to be ourselves. Because quite often in other jobs, you have to fit in with whatever the administrative or political set up of that institution is, and you are that character. In a way, this has just allowed us to be very much ourselves, to express ourselves on our own piece of land.*" P11* (Mixed, >20ha)

"*You've got freedom to play with the landscape, to plant trees on this bit of land or grow grass on it or make it into a conservation area or whatever, you've got that freedom. I had a lovely time with that in many ways.*" P22 (Mixed, 100+ha)

4.2.1 Practice Generated Responsibility

The freedom and autonomy expressed here can be linked back to Franklin et al.'s (2021) work on farmer experiences of NVZ regulation, where overly rigid policy limited farmer autonomy and thus could engender a distancing of responsibility. Similarly, Singleton (2012) found that it was prosaic and embodied farming practice that generated responsibility, in contrast to the prescriptive accountability demands from 'top down' policy. The economic conditions which drove both spatial and organisational expansion were framed by one interviewee as preventative to best practice:

"It's like the dairy farmer, you can't have a few cows now, a nice little farm where you send them out. You've got to have hundreds, and you've got to drive them hard, and you've got to milk the bones out of them. And once they start dropping, get them killed and get another in" P25*(horticulture, 100+ha)

This feeling of "*you've got to*" suggests the potential for responsibility to be distanced when a farmer feels they have no choice regarding the quality of enacted care. One farmer, an organic arable producer who engaged in knowledge sharing with both conventional and regenerative farm businesses, noted:

"The difficulty is I'm speaking to people who are bosses, and they're not sitting on the sprayer. I sat on the sprayer for, I don't know, 15 years, or maybe more. And I saw mammals being sprayed, and licking themselves…And all the things that you think, "Well, gosh, I'm spraying absolutely everything."…I feel farming has got a very strong responsibility to deal with that, and be honest about it." P23 (Mixed, 100+ha)

This farmer named witnessing the consequences of chemical spraying as a motivating factor for his transition to organic. Witnessing animals licking chemicals from their bodies affected P23 in a way that generated a sense of responsibility, echoing Singleton's (2012) argument that the embodied practices of farming can give rise to responsibility. Franklin et al.'s work illustrates how such responsibility can be lost if autonomy is constrained through rigid policy (2021). When distance is created between those who direct care and those who enact it (and hold localised knowledge about how it should be enacted), those who practice care may 'give up' on attempts to enact responsibility. Spatial and organisational expansion risk furthering this distance between decision-makers and practice-enactors, as shown by P23's example of speaking to "*bosses*" rather than those "*sitting on the sprayer*". Those making the decisions on these farms are not the same people enacting the practice, and thus they lack the opportunity to be affected by and directly experience the reality of chemical spraying. Conversely, many farmers interviewed gave examples of challenging farming experiences which affected them and generated feelings of responsibility:

"When my crops look gorgeous, and when they look full of promise, I'm proud to be a farmer. When I'm throwing lambs into the dead pit – well, not dead pit, the dead bin, because the cold, and the wind, and the rain has killed them, or they've had some dose of problems, then that isn't any fun at all." P12 (Mixed, 100+ha)

"I hate shooting calves, but because I'm the boss, it's my job. It comes down to me. And I will do it, but I don't like it." P40 (Dairy, 100+ha)

"the financial bit doesn't bother me. I made a mistake with a lamb. Without too much detail, it was my fault that it died. As I say, the finance didn't bother me a bit. It's just that it was suffering that I probably felt" P13 (Mixed livestock, 50-100ha)

Allowing oneself to be affected by the impact of farming practice is what makes a genuinely skilled practitioner who is sensitive to the needs and wider environment of those they are 'caring for' (Krzywoszynska, 2016). Besides producing distance between decision-maker and practicer-enactor, expansion can also disrupt the potential for attentiveness and 'touch' to occur, as identified by one farmer:

"it's that more personal touch, isn't it? It's that connection, between animals, and so on. I mean, I shudder to think about these big dairies…[the vet] said one of their people they go to, they milk nearly 1,000 cows in one place…They just work in the thing, a cow comes through,

and they just wash it, put the machines on, take the machines off…there's no contact between animal and man." P33 (dairy, 100+ha)

In P33's opinion, the scale of these dairies results in reduced moments of contact, limiting the knowledge that can be gathered through attentive engagement. This 'contact' is literal but also about making time for, and paying attention to, the cows as individuals. P33 detailed how his care for his cattle contrasts to the dairies he is discussing, noting: productive longevity ("*we've got one or two that have done 15 lactations…[versus] about three to four lactations, certainly on bigger farms*"); the 'lifestyle' of the cows ("*[their] cows never go out. They never go out in a field*"); the age at which they are bred ("*they're tending to say now that the heifers, the younger cattle, should go to the bull when they're about 18 months old. Well, I mean, they're barely more than calves!*").

The 'value' of the care P33 is discussing can be understood as both extrinsic (related to the productive lifespan of the cow) and intrinsic, relating to what is best on an ethical level, irrespective of productivity. P33 noted that his cows are bred usually between 24-30 months, but he will delay if he feels this is best. The ability to judge a cow's maturity on an individual basis *and act* on this knowledge by delaying breeding, requires attentive and individualised knowledge. The choice to delay may also intersect with particular economic contexts, some farmers may have the knowledge that a delay would be preferable, but feel that doing so is not financially and/or practically feasible.

P33 commented that on these other dairies "*all they do is milk the cows*", showing the importance for contact outside of a purely productive manner in order for a more holistic understanding of the cattle to be gained. The dairies P33 is discussing are probably larger on a spatial level than his own farm. However, it is the way these farms function on an organisational level (the ratio of individual labourer to individual cow) that he identifies as corrosive to "*contact between animal and man*". The greater the number of animals directly intersects with the ability for more localised care to be enacted.

4.2.2 Capacity for Attentiveness

Other participants give examples which illustrate how attentive engagement over time works to generate the kind of localised care which P33 identifies as missing:

"we're on a fairly small farm, I walk the boundaries every day, to check the sheep, so I know every square inch of it, and it is interesting, you see everything move in cycles, and it's

different each year…one year when we were plagued by small black beetles, the ones that hunt slugs…one harsh winter, when we reckon it was so cold that none of the bugs went through, and we lost our population of Little Owls. So it's so delicate, on its own, that any kind of interference, you have to really consider, and understand the environment you're changing, before you make those changes. I think that's the main problem, is that, a lot of the time, because you're looking at the big picture, you're ignoring what those interactions will have to the immediate microcosm, because it's so delicate" P24* (Mixed, >20ha)

It was precisely because this farm was smaller in size that P24* is able to walk the boundaries daily, a mundane and everyday act, allowing attentiveness. This enabled him to connect how a cold winter impacted insect population, resulting in the loss of Little Owls. This illustrates the kind of experiential knowledge which smaller farm size allows for, showing how the development of such intimate knowledge can be troubled by spatial expansion. Similar conclusions can be drawn from this example:

"There used to be curlews forever here and right across the fellside behind us…apart from a bit that has now been planted has had no fertiliser, no mowing, nothing. It only had sheep and very few cattle grazing on it. The birds were there. Suddenly, they disappeared and the only reason I can think of- We used to dip sheep with the old carbolic dips and then these modern fancy dips appeared, and the birds' nests all had a little bit of wool in them and I think that was the connection." P26 (Mixed, 100+ha)

Notably, P26 operates a substantially larger holding than the previous example. While there may be a point at which increasing spatial scale more directly affects attentiveness, the size difference between the farms operated by P26 and P24* cautions against overly simplistic interpretations. The literal size of the farm is a condition which can (dis)able attentiveness but doesn't solely determine it. How farm labour is organised also shapes attentive 'noticing' over time. P26, who is over 80 years old, runs a family farm and has farmed the same area all of his life. His intimate attentiveness over the years has enabled him to connect changes in sheep-dip to reduced bird populations. P26's example illustrates how the organisational scale of farm businesses mediates how such knowledge is generated. In this case, a small labour force that farm the same area over generations allows for long-term continuity of engagement through which such place-based knowledge accumulates. 'Small labour force' in this particular example refers to a father (P26), three sons and the part-time involvement of two grandchildren. P26's wife was also present for this interview, and she

discussed her own work on the farm in the past and how she now takes on, in her words, a "*catering*" role (Gasson, 1992).

It is difficult to give a precise definition of a family farm, but Singleton (2012) draws on Hacker's (1990) exploration of the agriculture to agribusiness shift. This change is described as "where people who live on the land also work it and make decisions about it, to a system of large corporations that control food production and supply" (Singleton, 2012, paraphrasing Hacker). This organisational change echoes the concerns of P6 regarding the "corporatisation" of farming and of the distance between decision-makers and practice-enactors noted by P23. While this does not mean that larger or more corporate farming operations are inherently 'uncaring' (Lockie and Halpin, 2005), this does show how expanding organisational scale reshapes the conditions under which care is enacted, troubling the capacity for attentive, experiential knowledge to be built and for this knowledge to inform decision making.

P18, a goat farmer, expanded and then reduced her herd size for ethical reasons. She described how expanding the herd had put too much pressure on the land, resulting in an increase in illness, feed costs, and required "*keeping the weaker ones*". This undermined overall herd health, economic viability, and increased her workload (no extra labour was brought on board). P18 described a larger herd as "*too many for me to cope with on my own, and you would miss things or you didn't spot things or you couldn't quite get round everything"* (see Burton et al., 2012; Wilkie, 2005). The (negative) interplay between 'scaling up' on an organisational level and attentiveness can be seen here. Expanding the footprint of the farm would have mediated some of these issues by reducing pressure on the land and some of the associated welfare issues. However, lacking the funds to buy more land and hire additional labour, P18 returned to a smaller herd size. In this case, profitability was not in conflict with 'good care' as the increased medical and feed costs meant a larger herd was less profitable. Another farmer who was in the process of reversing herd size was P38, a dairy farmer on over 100ha, who was introducing Automatic Milking Systems (AMS). AMS allows for cows to choose when they are milked and reduces the physical labour required of the farmer. P38 explained that this technology will allow him to downsize the herd, from 220 cows to 160, without impacting profitability:

"*we're getting smaller, but we're going to concentrate more on those cows, and give them a better environment, a better place, better feed systems, and so on. They will actually produce*

almost as much milk as the 200. So, from an environmental perspective…there's less emissions, but the yield goes up. Those emissions are divided between the litres of milk, so it's actually more efficient… it gives us the opportunity to spend more time looking after the cows as individuals, and more time caring about them. It seems to be a much fairer, nicer way to manage a farm. You're not constantly getting rushed to get milked, and stuff like that."

P38 is considering multiple factors here, enacting better care towards his cows but also responding to the global environment by reducing emissions and increasing efficiency. The impact of technology on farm care is complex (Butler and Holloway, 2015; Hansen, 2014; Lundström and Lindblom, 2021). Werkheiser (2018) has critiqued some agricultural technology, including AMS, because it minimises attentiveness and individual knowledge of each animal by reducing farmer-cow contact. In this case, however, care is a motivating factor for this technology, as it is considered to improve welfare and increase attentiveness to individual cows. Here, technology acts to mediate the pressure to expand the herd for financial reasons, enabling increased profitability without expansion.

Another farmer, P2, who ran a beef herd, noted how he enacts what he sees as 'good care' within the slaughter process, allowing himself to be affected by the process. Prior to establishing his herd, he went to witness a slaughter to ensure he was comfortable with the reality. P2 described how he selects cattle in pairs and moves them into a separate field – "*the departure lounge*". He then familiarises them with the transport trailer by feeding them in it for several days. When transporting them, he aims to load them calmly: "*in the early days, I was really having to push animals into the trailer, and that's distressing for them. And for me."* P2 felt it was important that he personally enact these stages and be present for the slaughter; *"these are my animals, I bring them into the world. Right at the end. So the last person they see is Dad".* P2 had a herd of approximately 65 cattle, each with given names. He can retain a level of emotional closeness and attentiveness towards each individual cow *because* of the smaller size of this herd. This then informs his enactment of the slaughter process where there is an element of "bearing witness" to the death of the cows (Gillespie, 2016).

This case, exemplifying the entanglement of violence and care, illustrates how the care-provider can also gain through the act of care-giving. For P2, his slaughter process is also a way for him to enact care towards himself, given that a distressing slaughter is also emotionally difficult for him. Whilst P2 did not frame it in this way, there is also the

potential that this process is a way to alleviate guilt that may occur as part of slaughter (Milligan and Wiles, 2010: 737). It's crucial to note that these acts are possible because of both the smaller size of the farm (20-50ha) and its financial context; P2 does not have to rely on high levels of farm profitability due to previous and ongoing income from non-agricultural business. Reduced economic pressure – less of the "*you've got to*" feeling mentioned by P25* – enables P2 to enact his definition of 'good care' in the context of slaughter. Organisational factors (smaller herd size, solo farmer), the modest footprint of the farm, and reduced economic pressure together create the conditions that allow for this 'good care' to operate.

The emotional proximity detailed by P2 allows for him to enact a more caring slaughter process, but it should also be noted that emotional proximity is something that must be managed for the sake of the farmer's own wellbeing. P38 detailed:

"*When the economics don't stack up, you end up making some pretty horrible decisions, but they still have to be made. So, I think there is a tendency to become hardened about it… I don't think it ever gets any easier, but I think you become hardened to it.*" (Dairy, 100+ha)

P38 is noting how he must *create* emotional distance at times, for his own wellbeing and to sustain his ability to engage in the work over the long-term. This illustrates the complex reality of 'care in practice' where detachment can be part of longer-time attachment and/or 'better' care (Mol et al., 2010). Farming can't be removed from the economic reality that it operates in (Harbers, 2010). However, there is a risk that increasing economic pressures may force farmers to become so 'hardened' that they also lose the capacity to be affectively attuned.

4.2.3 Changing Experiences of Farm Work

Farmers reflected on how expansion changes the nature of their work. One interview (P25) involved two lifelong farmers running a 100+ha horticultural farm together, who described expansion as key to the farm's continuity but reflected on how it had changed their work:

"Participant: *I've always enjoyed it. A little bit less now I'm enjoying it.*
Interviewer: *What's changed?*
Participant: *It is farming still, but it's more…It's that, emails and-*
Secondary Participant: *-Big business…When I started here [in 1972] there'd be, round here, 20 or 30 brassica growers, from here. Everybody just had a few acres. Whereas now, brassica*

growers- We're the big- I never thought we'd be the biggest, ever. But the ones that are left, they might be, what did you say, two or three?
Participant: *Well, in [county], probably five, maybe… We've gone from 20 acres to 200 acres, trying to stand still, producing them for less money…[I see myself as] more businessman [than farmer] nowadays…you get stuck behind this* [gestures to computer]*, or your phone's going all the time, and you're thinking, "I'd just love to cut brassica." If I go to a rig, and I'll have half an hour cutting, I'm thinking, "This is just so good." It's lovely, because you're back touching what you've - but then your phone will go, and you get dragged away with it because you've got a problem with something else.*
Interviewer: *And is that how farming is going in general or is that as you progressed up the ranks?*
Participant: *Yes, farming in general. Yes, 100%.*
Secondary Participant: *A lot, lots of family's farms, where the son left school and followed his father, if he's not business minded enough or agronomy minded, you just can't do it anymore. So, he gets a job and works for a bigger company. So, he just drives his tractor all day for one of these bigger outfits."*

P25 directly names how the organisational and spatial expansion of his farm business has changed the nature of his work. An increased focus on desk-based engagement with buyers has limited his ability to engage directly with the practice of farming, to be, in his words, "*back touching*" the brassicas. This is not only a loss for the farmer in terms of limited time spent doing what he enjoys, but also a loss of time spent engaged in the embodied, prosaic acts of farming. Whilst these farmers were able to display experiential knowledge from their previous (and ongoing) time spent physically farming, the changing nature of the business has limited their ability to continue engaging in this practice. Whilst the affective aspect of 'caring about' remained, the ability to 'care for' was reduced. The alternative, as outlined, would be to become a farm labourer for a larger business, thus engaging in the act of 'caring for' more frequently but with limited autonomy over what 'caring for' should entail. P25 noted that their expansion has been financially sustainable because they have limited additional staffing costs:

"*I'm running around like a blue arse fly. But we've not got that overhead. And we're probably daft for doing it, but that's how we've survived, I think. The [competitor name] used to grow brassicas, but they'd have a guy walking crop, they'd have a guy selling the crop…automatically, you've got £60,000 worth of wages, before you even cut the crop.*"

Organisational expansion in this case has increased farmer workload. In her study on permaculture, Puig de la Bellacasa argued that practitioners must "make time" to be affected by soil to enact better care (2015). She is referring to both the literal act of making time, and the ability to consider the slower temporal reality of soil. The unavoidable experience of "*running around like a blue arse fly*" minimises P25's ability to "make time" to be affected, another limit on 'good' 'caring for' which is correlated to both spatial and organisational expansion.

A similar perspective was given by P17, a poultry farmer who runs a large business producing free range eggs for major retailers and hospitality chains. His business produces their own supply on over 100ha but also buys in stock. P17, who had previously farmed both sheep and poultry, outlined how the success and expansion of his business made him more of a businessman than a farmer. When I asked how he felt about this change, he said:

"*I enjoy the farming…You can make a difference. The day-to-day farming, it's nice to see that the animals that you're using to make your money-Things are being done right, you're doing the best you can by both your animals and your profitability if you can… I miss my sheep. I still do.*"

The example of P17 is important because it stresses how large farm businesses – this business supplies major food retailers and fast-food chains – should not be deemed automatically 'uncaring'. However, the ability to enact "*day-to-day farming*" does impact the maintenance of *experiential* knowledge. It also impacts the farmer themselves, in this case (and with P25 discussed above) a sense of loss is expressed about a time when the practical "*day-to-day farming*" was routine. P17's ability to gain satisfaction and pride from acts of care-giving – "*You can make a difference…Things are being done right"* – is also changed as his business has grown. For P17, care was enacted through more abstract expressions, such as advocating for improved welfare across the poultry industry. He noted that the size and success of his business increased his level of clout within the industry.

4.3 Diversification

19 farmers interviewed reported having diversified, with five who had not diversified expressing a desire to. There was considerable variation in the types of diversification discussed. Seven participants had diversified into accommodation, such as holiday cottages, while four ran educational activities such as workshops. Three operated hospitality businesses such as cafes, and two had farm shops. One further participant had previously run

a farm shop but it had closed due to both a lack of business and personal circumstances. Four ran other entrepreneurial businesses using farmland and/or farm equipment. Two processed food products on farm, for example turning milk into yoghurt. Five rented parts of their farms to other businesses, although this took several forms: four rented land to enterprises (e.g. a children's nursery), one rented infrastructure to non-agricultural producers (e.g. bedding plant growers), and one allowed a quarry to operate on the farm. Several farmers undertook more than one form of diversification, with six reporting multiple activities. P4, one of the two interviewees who had semi-retired, had found beef farming so unprofitable in comparison to his diversified business (on-farm recycling and biomass facility) that he shifted his time towards the latter, hence his semi-retired status.

All five horticultural and four out of the five dairy farmers had diversified. While the sample used in this research does not permit generalisation across sectors, this pattern may reflect farm type characteristics. Horticultural businesses, for example, produce perishable outputs which can be sold to consumers without significant processing. This makes diversification such as farm shops or pick-your-own attractive options for farms that wish to engage in local supply chains, niche markets, and/or quickly sell a perishable product. Dairy farms operate under high fixed costs and price volatility, increasing incentives to pursue additional income streams. A low price per unit of milk also makes diversification through on-farm processing, such as turning milk into ice cream or yogurt, an attractive way to add value and generate a separate revenue stream.

Five farmers (P6, P19, P21, P38, P40) spoke positively about diversification. P38 operated a non-food retail business, café and restaurant on farm. P38 also ran a farm shop, something P40 also did alongside producing cheese. These farmers said that diversification had bettered their social lives and provided a positive variation to their work. P19, an arable farmer who rented land out to other business and self-operated dog walking fields, commented that this extra income had allowed for some pressure to be taken off their arable production, making a recently unsuccessful harvest less stressful. P6 said that diversifying had allowed him to "*scratch an itch*" of entrepreneurial desire, with P38 similarly commenting that diversification was driven by his desire for a change as part of a "*mid-life crisis*". P21, who had holiday accommodation on his farm, reflected on his experience of farming in the 1980s when bad harvests and high interest rates had made farming "*very tough going*". His holiday cottages were established at this time, with the support of government diversification grants.

P21 said that whilst the experience of farming at the time had been negative, the holiday cottages supported him "*not just financially*" but also by giving:

"a bit of purpose, that we could see we were doing that was working. Because farming was tough, but the cottages were making money." (Arable[8], 100+ha)

In all of these cases, diversification was financially motivated but also served as a tool of care, attending to the social needs and overall wellbeing of the farmers in question and reducing the stress of less successful agricultural production. Diversification can mitigate financial risk, an act of care towards the farm as a business and the farmer as an individual operating within high risk, low profit margin markets where farmers are often vulnerable within supply chains. The financial necessity of diversification is illustrated clearly in these particular examples:

"now you've got to be big to survive. The small family farm, what have we done? We've diversified…to keep it going…we have holiday cottages" P27 (Mixed livestock, 50-100ha)

"[The quarry] has been a significant, substantial amount of money. Without the quarry I don't think we would still be fruit farming in all honesty." P8 (Horticulture, 20-50ha)

As seen with the quote from P27, expansion may be harder for smaller farms without the capital to purchase more land. Diversification is an attractive alternative to ensure financial stability, but also often requires upfront capital investment. Whilst diversification can enable care to be directed towards the farm as a business and potentially the individual farmer, it does, similarly to farm business expansion, alter the nature of the work. P41, a semi-retired beef farmer without direct diversification experience, reflected on local farms who had diversified through retail and hospitality, noting that the work has changed so that they "*farm the people rather than farm the animals".*

Not all farmer responses to diversification were positive, though. P27 voiced that they resent having to diversify, even though it was financially necessary. This perspective was similarly expressed by P30 who resisted diversification:

"*Our ethos is that we want to be able to be a profitable business just by producing milk or just by producing a commodity product. So whether we have beef animals as well or something, but we don't want to use other sources. So things like renting out storage space*

[8] P21 was an arable farmer at the time of interview, but had previously farmed sheep as well. It is unclear if the farming type practiced during the 1980s was arable or arable and sheep.

and things to prop it up, because why should we have to do other parts of a business to subsidise retailers? We don't get paid enough by the retailers as it trickles down, so therefore why should we bother? Why should I have to work even harder and stretch my skill base even further?" (Dairy, 100+ha)

P30 is naming how diversification places increased demand on farmers' time and capacity. This will vary depending on the type of diversification, renting out land for a quarry will have different impacts on farmer workload than running a separate business. Farmers regularly discussed the variety of skills they had to develop *within* their farming roles, for example:

"At the moment, farmers are expected to do just about everything. We're expected to be chemists, and botanists, and midwives, and accountants. And we're supposed to understand tax law, and we're supposed to be able to liaise with the government, and we're supposed to keep on top of a mountain of reformed paperwork, and regulations, and there are serious consequences for getting on the wrong side of any of them." P24* (Mixed livestock, >20ha)

The need to also develop non-agricultural skills for diversification places increased pressure on farmers and risks limiting their ability to maintain and develop agricultural skills – including those of care. This occurs alongside, as noted by P24, regulation and policy requirements that are often enacted as ways to encourage farmers to 'care more'. Apparent in interviews with diversification-experienced farmers was that the majority would rather be solely farming, echoing Allison's evaluation that "farmers want to farm. It gives them their identity" (1996: 142).

Much like with the case of expansion explored above, these increased demands on farmers' time and energy risks limiting their ability to engage with the acts of 'caring for' the farm. Developing experiential knowledge required for the enactment of 'good care' requires attentiveness and staying consistently attuned to farm inhabitants and land. Having, or choosing, to run non-farm businesses can detract from a farmer's capacity to develop this knowledge. This is especially true for farms which do not have the revenue to employ others to perform diversification-related work. A tension emerges here: diversification can lower stress by reducing pressure on farm profitability, but it can also increase stress through greater workload. It can also pose a challenge to farmer identity, particularly if diversification changes farming from a full-time to a part-time endeavour (Sutherland, 2020). As a result, it can be experienced as corrosive to farming traditions and heritage, all of which can be important elements for the development of experiential knowledge (Di Domenico and

Miller, 2012). This is illustrated by P31, a horticultural farmer who had not been profitable for three years and felt pessimistic about the future. When questioned about the future of his farm, he said:

"It could well be that we'll take out all the fruit trees and stop being a fruit farm. Maybe we'll have grassland and dog walkers…But unless this [fruit] job picks up, all those trees will be gone… I will want to exit when we get to that stage. I won't enjoy it at all…I don't see that as a bone fide way to make a living out of a farm. I see that as a soft option, not enjoyable, not what I went to college for. It just doesn't fit with my ideals at all. I'd rather exit." P31 (100+ha)

P31 is describing a situation where the financial rewards for diversified activity increase to the point that no farming remains, as seen with the case of P4 who largely left farming to focus on his diversification business. A version of this was also seen with the example of P21, who found "*purpose*" in running holiday cottages when his farm income was struggling during the 1980s. Conflicts emerge between the farm as a business, the farm as a parcel of land with non-farm business potential, and the identity of the farmer. The desire to farm persists, but reduced capacity limits engagement in the embodied, attentive practices through which care is enacted.

4.4 Implications for 'Good Care' within English Agriculture

What has been discussed cannot be reduced to something as simple as "larger farm businesses are less caring" or "farmers engaging in diversification enact 'worse' care". However, farm business expansion and/or diversification does pose risks for specific components of 'good care'. Capacity to 'care for' can be reduced, impacting the maintenance of experiential knowledge, the acquisition of responsibility through practice, and the ability to "make time" to be affected. Greater distance between those who enact care and those who make decisions is opened up as operational expansion occurs. Conversely, the decisions to expand and/or diversify are often motivated by care for the farm as a whole and the farmer as an individual, for example, if diversification reduces economic risk or if expansion is seen as the only option to remain farming. These are examples of how care can work to both resist and uphold wider, problematic agri-food systems (Rutt and Møller, 2025).

Deciding to expand or diversify can uphold an agri-food system where farmers are expected to adapt to difficult economic conditions through increased workload and/or compromising

the level of care that can be given. For others, adapting is becoming increasingly unappealing, as outlined by P9 who listed the rising expenses of various inputs before saying:

"*Frankly, it's got to the point where, if I get pushed anymore, I'll just jack it in, and they'll be the losers, because there isn't many of us out there. I always tell people, when I started growing potatoes in the '80s, there were 45,000 potato growers in the country. There are now under 2,000…You know, when the little man can't make a bob, or he's not big enough to demand a customer, then that's what happens.*" (Arable, 100+ha)

P9's desire to "*jack it in*" represents a refusal to continue absorbing further stress and an act of resistance towards unmanageable market prices. This refusal, an act of care towards the self, can further an agri-food system where farms become fewer and larger, as is already being seen. However, as I have said, for many the decision to expand or diversify is unavoidable: the alternative is to stop farming. This is a reality within British agriculture, with an increasing number of farmers leaving the industry (Joosse and Grubbström, 2017). For farmers who feel "*hefted"* to the land (P24) or that the farm "*is me*" (P33), leaving would sever a long-standing relationship, rupturing not just an occupation but a deep cultural attachment (Wheeler et al., 2018). The loss of peers was something keenly felt by interviewees. Land being removed from agricultural production was seen as "*morally repugnant*" (P17) and peer departure was seen as a loss of knowledge; "*that skill has gone forever"* (P6). Reduction in farm numbers can thus be read as a loss of experiential knowledge and good 'caring for'.

There is nuance here – not every farmer will enact best practice, even outside of conditions of economic constraints, and the high-cost of entry into farming limits access to many who may have passion, skill and experiential knowledge but lack the capital needed to invest in land or struggle to access a tenancy. Entry costs limit on-farm labourers, who experience the daily reality of farming and the responsibility this can generate, from being able to run their own farm and enact care more autonomously.

5. Conclusion

The overarching themes from this research are that both expansion and diversification pose risks for farmers' abilities to engage in the embodied, prosaic practice of 'caring for', to "make time" to be affected, and to engage in forms of contact which generate responsibility. Risks to the building and maintaining of experiential knowledge, needed for 'good care' to be enacted, are identified. Increasing organisational scale of farm businesses was largely

perceived to threaten individual autonomy, including the autonomy to enact 'good care' on farmers' own terms. Distance between those who 'care for' and those who make decisions over how care should be enacted is produced when a farm expands on an organisational level.

However, there is considerable nuance identified within this paper which is important to stress. Those who engage in 'caring for' are not automatically enacting the most ideal versions of care, but they are exposed to contexts where responsibility through practice can be generated. Diversification types will impact farmer capacity differently, and some farmers found that diversification improved their experiences of farming. Increased income generated through expansion and/or diversification can also be read as an act of care towards the overall sustainability of a farm business and/or the farmer's identity.

Acts of care towards the self and/or the farm business can work to uphold a problematic agri-food system where farmers' care is exploited (Singleton, 2010; Singleton and Law, 2013; Graddy-Lovelace, 2020). However, these decisions also allow farmers who 'care about' farming to remain in the industry. Larger (either spatially and/or organisationally) farms cannot be reduced to the label of 'uncaring'. However, care is found to be renegotiated within these settings, away from embodied acts and towards more abstract expressions. This has implications for the development of experiential knowledge required for 'good care' (Krzywoszynska, 2016).

By stressing the importance, and vulnerability, of embodied acts of caring, experiential knowledge, and responsibility generated by practice, I seek to "infuse the quotidian and ethical merits of care into political concepts, policies, and private/public governance mechanisms" (Cusworth, 2023: 70, paraphrasing Popke, 2006). Demands and expectations placed on farmers which require them to 'care more' should take stock of the economic contexts within which farmers operate, and the impact this has on how care is renegotiated. The goal is not to critique the intrinsic merit of policy or regulatory motivation which seeks to enable more sustainable and ethical farm practice, but to outline a contradiction between expectations and economic conditions.

To return to Rutt and Møller's framing of care as often misconstrued, representing a "missile laden with aspirations" (2025: 1175) this paper concludes that care is not a silver bullet, for farming or for anything. As I and others have detailed, it contains, creates and reproduces tensions, contradictions and further complexities. Care is a sticky substance – it gets on unintended recipients as well as intended ones. It can often be applied to some lives and not

to, or at the expense of, others. History, context, broader power dynamics are inextricably stuck to it too. In acknowledging this sticky reality, it can be tempting to wash our hands of it. However, care also operates as an affective glue, hardening into a long-lasting commitment to farming. Not an unbreakable tie, or a glamorous one, or one that should always be uncritically valorised at the expense of self-sacrifice, but a messy, partial, bond which grants, among other things, the grit needed for gripping. Its necessity is a lot like farming, in a way:

"*Farming is about life, death, tears, smiles, hard work. It's real life…It isn't all wonderful…But that's what life should be.*" P3 (Mixed, 20-50ha)

References

Allen, C. (2001) Back to the old house? 'Sick role' and biographical housing needs of short stay hospital patients, *Health and Place* (7)

Allison, L. (1996) On planning a forest: theoretical issues and practical problems, *Town Planning Review* (67:2)

Barlow, H., Lostak, M. (2023) Retailer and grower relationships and the supply chain pressures in English horticulture: The lived experience, *Journal of Rural Studies* (102: 11)

Bartos, A. (2019) Introduction: Stretching the Boundaries of Care, *Gender, Place and Culture* (26:6)

Brown, M. (2003) Hospice and the spatial paradoxes of terminal care*, Environment and Planning A* (35)

Brown, C., Kovács, E., Herzon, I., Villamayor-Tomas, S., Albizua, A., Galanaki, A., Grammatikopoulou, I., McCracken, D., Alkan Olsson, J., Zinnegrebe, Y. (2011) Simplistic understandings of farmer motivations could undermine the environmental potential of the common agricultural policy, *Land Use Policy* (101)

Burch, D., Lawrence, G. (2007) *Supermarkets and Agri-Food Supply Chains: Transformations in the production and consumption of foods* (Edward Elgar)

Burns, F., Mordue, S., Al-Fulaij, N., Boersch-Supan, P., Boswell, J., Boyd, R J., Bradfer-Lawrence, T., de Ornellas, P., de Palma, A., de Zylva, P., Dennis, E B., Fostor, S., Gilbert, G., Halliwell, L., Hawkins, K., Haysom, K A., Holland, M., Hughes, J.,

Jackson, A C., Mancini, F., Mathews, F., McQuatters-Gollop, A., Noble, D., O'Brien, D., Pescott, O L., Purvis, A., Simkin, J., Smith, A., Stanbury, A., Villemot, J., Walton, P., Webb, T J., Williams, J., Rilwon, R., Gregory, R D. (2023) *State of Nature Report*, https://stateofnature.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/TP25999-State-of-Nature-main-report_2023_FULL-DOC-v12.pdf Accessed 22/2/26

Burton, R J F., Peoples, S., Cooper, M H. (2012) Building "cowshed cultures": A cultural perspective on the promotion of stockmanship and animal welfare on dairy farms, *Journal of Rural Studies* (28:2)

Busch, L. (2011) The private governance of food: equitable exchange or bizarre bazaar?, *Agriculture and Human Values* (28)

Busch, L., Bain, C. (2004) New! Improved? The Transformation of the Global Agrifood System, *Rural Sociology* (69:3)

Butler, D., Holloway, L. (2015) Technology and restructuring the social field of dairy farming: hybrid capitals, "stockmanship" and automatic milking systems, *Sociologia Ruralis* (56:4)

Campbell, H. (2013) Food and the audit society, in, Murcott, A., Belasco, W., Jackson, P. (eds.) *The Handbook of Food Research* (Bloomsbury Publishing)

Clapp, J., Fuchs, D. (2009) *Corporate Power in Global Agrifood Governance* (MIT Press)

Clark, B., Proctor, A., Boaitey, A., Mahon, N., Hanley, N., Holloway, L. (2024) Animal health and welfare as a public good: what do the public think? *Agriculture and Human Values* (41)

Coulson, H., Milbourne, P. (2022) Agriculture, food and land: Struggles for UK post-Brexit agri-food justice, *Geoforum* (131)

CPRE (Campaign to Protect Rural England) (2017) Uncertain harvest: does the loss of farms matter? https://www.cpre.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/CPREZUncertainZHarvest.pdf Accessed 20/2/25

Curry, J M. (2002) Care Theory and 'caring' systems of Agriculture, *Agriculture and Human Values* (19)

Cusworth, G. (2023) Metabolic agricultural ethics: Violence and care beyond the gate, *Progress in Environmental Geography* (2:1-2)

De Roest, K., Ferrari, P., Knickel, K. (2017) Specialisation and economies of scale or diversification and economies of scope? Assessing different agricultural development pathways, *Journal of Rural Studies* (59)

DEFRA (Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs) (2026) Chapter 5: Diversification, https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/farm-accounts-in-england/chapter-5-diversification--2 Accessed 22/2/26

Di Domenico, M., Miller, G. (2012) Farming and tourism enterprise: experiential authenticity in the diversification of independent small-scale farming, *Tourism Management* (33:2)

Enticott, G. (2012) The local universality of veterinary expertise and the geography of animal disease, *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* (37:1)

Enticott, G., O'Mahony, K. (2024) Feeding time(s): Patient urgence and the need for careful temporalities of antimicrobial resistance, *Environment and Planning E* (7:3)

Fisher, B., Tronto, J. (1990) Towards a Feminist Theory of Care, in, Abel, E., Nelson, M. (eds.) *Circles of Care* (State University of New York Press)

Food Foundation, The (2025) Corporate lobbying: the dark side of the plate. https://foodfoundation.org.uk/publication/corporate-lobbying-dark-side-plate Accessed 8/12/25

Franklin, A., Udall, D., Schmutz, U., Rayns, F. (2021) 'Hell or high water': Good farming and environmental care as contested practices in the implementation of nitrate vulnerable zones in Wales, *Journal of Rural Studies* (83)

Franks, J R. (2022) UK Agriculture at a crossroads, *Outlook on Agriculture* (51:4)

Franks, J R. (2009) Size and non-size effects on the profitability of farms in English less favoured areas, *Journal of Farm Management* (13:7)

Freeman, R. (2017) Care, policy, knowledge: Translating between worlds, *The Sociological Review* (65:2)

Fry, T., Marino, A., Nijhawan, S. (2022) Killing with Care: Locating ethical congruence in Multispecies, *ACME* (21:2)

Gasson, R. (1992) Farmers' Wives – Their contribution to the farm business, *Journal of Agricultural Economics* (43:1)

Gilbert, G. (2001) *Researching Social Life* (Sage)

Gillespie, K. (2016) Witnessing Animal Others: Bearing Witness, Grief, and the Political Function of Author(s), *Hypatia* (31:3)

Ginn, F. (2014) Stick lives: slugs, detachment and more-than-human ethics in the garden, *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* (39)

Glaser, B G., Strauss, A L. (1967) *The Discovery of Grounded Theory* (Aldine)

Graddy-Lovelace, G. (2020) Plants: Crop Diversity Pre-Breeding Techniques as Agrarian Care Co-Opted? *Area* (52:1)

Grant, K R., Amaratunga, C., Armstrong, P., Boscoe, M., Pederson, A., Willson, K. (2004) *Caring For/Caring About: Women, Home Care and Unpaid Care Giving* (Garamond Press)

Greer, A., Grant, W. (2023) Divergence and continuity after Brexit in agriculture, *Journal of European Public Policy* (30:11)

Groenhout, R. E. (2004) *Connected Lives: Human Nature and an Ethics of Care* (Rowman and Littlefield)

Hacker, S. (1990) *Doing it the Hard Way: Investigations of Gender and Technology*. (Unwin Hyman)

Hansen, P. (2014) Becoming bovine: mechanics and metamorphosis in Hokkaido's animal-human-machine, *Journal of Rural Studies* (33)

Haraway, D. (1988) Situated Knowledges: The science question in feminism and the privilege of partial perspective, *Feminist Studies* (14:3)

Haraway, D. (2013) A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology, and Socialist-Feminism in the late twentieth century, *The Transgender Studies Reader* (Routledge)

Harbers, J A. (2010) Animal farm love stories: About care and economy, in, Mol, A., Moser, I., Pols, J. (eds.) *Care in practice: On tinkering in clinics, homes and farms* (Transcript)

Held, V. (2005) *The Ethics of Care: Personal, Political, and Global* (Oxford University Press)

Holloway, L., Mahon, N., Clark, B., Proctor, A. (2023) Living with cows, sheep and endemic disease in the North of England: Embodied care, biosocial collectivities and killability, *Environment and Planning E* (6:2)

Hubbard, C., Davis, J., Feng, S., Harvey, D., Liddon, A., Moxey, A., Ojo, M., Patton, M., Philippidis, G., Scott, C., Shrestha, S. (2018) Brexit: how will UK agriculture fare? *EuroChoices* (17:2)

Jack, L., Hammans, H. (2022) Unpicking Food Prices: Where does your food pound go, and why do farmers get so little? *Sustain* https://www.sustainweb.org/news/nov22-unpicking-food-prices-new/ Accessed 5/12/24

Joosse, S., Grubbström, A. (2017) Continuity in farming – Not just a family business, *Journal of Rural Studies* (50)

Kam, H., Smith, H., Potter, C. (2023) Public money for public goods: the role of ideas in driving agriculture policy in the EU and post-Brexit UK, *Land Use Policy* (129)

Kolk, A., van Tulder, R. (2004) Setting new global rules? TNCs and codes of conduct, *Transnational Corporations* (14:3)

Konefal, J., Mascarenhas, M., Hatanaka, M. (2005) Governance in the global agro-food system: Backlighting the role of transnational supermarket chains, *Agriculture and Human Values* (22)

Krzywoszynska, A. (2016) What farmers know: Experiential knowledge and care in vine growing, *Sociologia Ruralis* (56:2)

Krzywoszynska, A. (2019) Caring for soil life in the Anthropocene: The role of attentiveness in more-than-human ethics, *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* (44:4)

Latour, B. (2007) *Reassembling the Social: an introduction to actor-network-theory* (Oxford University Press)

Lavau, S., Bingham, N. (2017) Practices of attention, possibilities for care: Making situations matter in food safety inspection, *The Sociological Review Monographs* (65:2)

Law, J. (2010) Care and killing: Tensions in veterinary practice, in, Mol, A., Moser, I., Pols, J. (eds.) *Care in practice: On tinkering in clinics, homes and farms* (Transcript)

Lawson, V. (2007) Geographies of care and responsibility, *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* (97:1)

Letourneau, A M., Davidson, D. (2022) Farmer identities: facilitating stability and change in agricultural system transitions, *Environmental Sociology* (8:4)

Lobley, M., Winter, M., Wheeler, R. (2018) *The Changing World of Farming in Brexit UK* (Taylor and Francis)

Lockie, S., Halpin, D. (2005) The 'conventionalisation' thesis reconsidered: Structural and ideological transformation of Australian organic agriculture, *Sociologia Ruralis* (45)

Lundström, C., Lindblom, J. (2021) Care in dairy farming with automatic milking systems, using an Activity Theory lens, *Journal of Rural Studies* (87)

Martin, A., Myers, N., Viseu, A. (2015) The Politics of Care in Technoscience, *Social Studies of Science* (45:5)

McCain (2025) *Farmdex Report 2025*, https://www.mccain.co.uk/media/s0wjuwhn/mccain_farmdexreport.pdf Accessed 10/12/25

McEwan, C., Goodman, M K. (2010) Place geography and the ethics of care: Introductory remarks on the geographies of ethics, responsibility and care, *Ethics, Place and Environment* (13:2)

McLoughlin, E. (2025) Change the world farm by farm: The moral care of audit and the paradox of animal welfare inspection in Europe, *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* (32:1)

Milligan, C., Wiles, J. (2010) Landscapes of Care, *Progress in Human Geography* (34: 6)

Mincyte, D., Bartkiene, A., Bikauskaite, R., Šakelaitė, I., Otte, P P. (2025) What does it mean to care in industrial agriculture? *Agriculture and Human Values* (42)

Mol, A. (2008) *The logic of care: health and the problem of patient choice* (Routledge)

Mol, A., Ingunn, M., Pols, J. (2010) *Care in practice: On tinkering in clinics, homes and farms* (Transcript)

Morris, C. (2006) Negotiation the boundary between state-led and farmer approaches to knowing nature: an analysis of UK agri-environmental schemes, *Geoforum* (37)

Morris, C., Holloway, L. (2009) Genetic technologies and the transformation of the geographies of UK livestock agriculture: a research agenda, *Progress in Human Geography* (33:3)

Murphy, M. (2015) Unsettling Care: troubling Transnational Itineries of Care in Feminist Health Practices, *Social Studies of Science* (45:5)

Overstreet, K K. (2018) '*A Well-Cared For Cow Produces More Milk': The Biotechnics of (Dis)Assembling Cow Bodies in Wisconsin Dairy World*, UC Santa Cruz Electronic Thesis and Dissertations, https://escholarship.org/uc/item/3q05z3wb Accessed 25/9/25

Parr, H. (2003) Medical Geography: Care and caring, *Progress in Human Geography* (27)

Popke, J. (2006) Geography and Ethics: Everyday Mediations Through Care and Consumption, *Progress in Human Geography* (19:1)

Puig de la Bellacasa, M. (2010) Ethical doings in naturecultures, *Ethics, Policy and Environment* (13:2)

Puig de la Bellacasa, M. (2015) Making time for soil: Technoscience futurity and the pace of care, *Social Studies of Science* (45)

Puig de la Bellacasa, M. (2017) *Matters of Care: Speculative ethics in more than human worlds* (University of Minnesota Press)

Raghuram, P., Madge, C., Noxolo, P. (2009) Rethinking responsibility and care for a postcolonial world, *Geoforum* (40:1)

Riley, M. (2008) Experts in their field: farmer-expert-knowledges and environmentally friendly farming practices, *Environment and Planning A* (40)

Riley, M., Harvey, D. (2005) Landscape archaeology, Heritage and the Community in Devon: An Oral History Approach, *International Journal of Heritage Studies* (11:4)

Rutt, R.L., Møller, A.S. (2025) Illuminating the care/repair nexus in the 'pandemic era', and the potential for care beyond repair in Danish poultry production, *Agriculture and Human Values* (42)

Sebastian, K. (2019) Distinguishing between the strains of grounded theory: classical, interpretive and constructivist, *Journal for Social Thought* (3)

Seth, A. Randall, G. (2020) *The Grocers: The rise and rise of the supermarket chains* (Kogan Page)

Shortall, O., Sutherland, L-A., Ruston, A., Kaler, J. (2018) True Cowmen and Commercial Farmers: Exploring Vets' and Dairy Farmers' Contrasting Views of 'Good Farming' in Relation to Biosecurity, *Sociologia Ruralis* (58:3)

Singleton, V. (2010) Good farming control or care?, in, Mol, A., Ingunn, M., Pols, J. (eds.) *Care in practice: On tinkering in clinics, homes and farms* (Transcript)

Singleton, V. (2012) When Contexts Meet: Feminism and Accountability in UK Cattle Farming, *Science, Technology and Human Values* (37:4)

Singleton, V., Law, J. (2013) Devices as rituals. Notes on enacting resistance, *Journal of Cultural Economy* (6:3)

Smith, D. (1998) How far should we care? On the spatial scope of beneficence, *Progress in Human Geography* (22)

Solveig, J., Law, J. (2017) Sámi salmon, state salmon: TEK, technoscience and care, *The Sociological Review* (65:2)

Stock, P V., Forney, J. (2014) Farmer autonomy and the farming self, *Journal of Rural Studies* (36)

Sutherland, L-A. (2020) Finding 'Hobby' farmers: a 'parish study' methodology for qualitative research, *Sociologia Ruralis* (60:1)

Taverner, C. (2025) Paying the Price: Cheap food, big business and the cost to farming and food security, *Food, Farming and Countryside Commission*, https://ffcc-uk.files.svdcdn.com/production/assets/downloads/FFCC_False-Economy_report_part2_v5-1.pdf?dm=1741863510 Accessed 20/12/25

Tronto, J C. (1993) *Moral Boundaries: A Political Argument for an Ethic of Care* (Routledge)

Tronto, J C. (2013) *Caring Democracy: Markets, equality and justice* (New York University Press)

Tronto, J C. (2015) Theories of care as a challenge to Weberian paradigms in social science, in, Engster, D., Hamington, M. (eds.) *Care Ethics and Political Theory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press)

Tsouvalis, J., Seymour, S., Watkins, C. (2000) Exploring knowledge-cultures: Precision farming, yield mapping, and the expert-farmer interface, *Environment and Planning A* (32:5)

Wentworth, J., Plumpton, H. (2019) *Climate Change and Agriculture* (POSTnote No.600) The Parliamentary Office of Science and Technology, https://doi.org/10.58248/PN600 Accessed 17/2/25

Werkheiser, I. (2018) Prevision Livestock Farming and Farmers' Duties to Livestock, *Journal of Agricultural and Environmental Ethics* (31:1)

West, S., Haider, L J., Masterson, V., Enqvist, J P., Svedin, U., Tengö, M. (2018) Stewardship, care and relational values, *Current Opinion in Environmental Sustainability* (35)

Wheeler, R., Morris, C., Lobley, M., Winter, M. (2018) 'The good guys are doing it anyway': the accommodation of environmental concern among English and Welsh farmers, *Environment and Planning E* (1:4)

Wicklow, D., Shortall, S. (2024) Power positions in the farm family, marrying in, and negative peer pressure: the social relations that impact agricultural practice, *Agriculture and Human Values* (42)

Wilkie, R. (2005) Sentient commodities and productive paradoxes: the ambiguous nature of human-livestock relations in Northeast Scotland, *Journal of Rural Studies* (21:2)

Wynne, B. (1996) May the sheep safely graze? A reflexive view of the expert-lay knowledge divide, in, Lash, M., Wynne, B., Szerszynski, B. (eds.) *Risk, Environment and Modernity: Towards a New Ecology* (Sage Publications)

Zimmermann, A., Heckelei, T. (2012) Structural change of European dairy farms: A cross-regional analysis, *Journal of Agricultural Economics* (63:3)

Chapter 7: "*You can only embrace it because you're not going to stop it. Why not embrace what's coming?*": Reconfiguration of 'Good Farmer' Identity and the Skill of Market Responsiveness in English Agriculture

Throughout my fieldwork and the following data analysis I also uncovered how changing political and economic contexts are shaping farmers' identities. 'Data analysis' really dresses up the reality of lying on the floor surrounded by highlighters and bits of paper and/or seeing the NVivo interface when you close your eyes, but you get the point. In the same way, 'changing political and economic contexts are shaping farmer's identities' could do with some more unpacking regarding what it really means.

A lot of existential themes emerged from farmer interviews, the kinds of questions that most of us ponder at some point in our lives. As children, we're often asked what we want to be when we grow up, which contains two core assumptions. Firstly, that we'll ever be 'done' growing up (if someone could let me know when that happens, that would be great), and secondly, that 'what we want to be' is intrinsically linked to the type of job we'll do. The latter is an assumption we could spend all day questioning, but it is a realistic evaluation on the role of farming to a farmer's identity. It's not 'just' a job – this is something firmly established within wider literature (Lloyd, 2026; Sullivan et al., 1996; Gray, 1998; Johnsen, 2003). As with anything, I am sure there are exceptions to this rule, but the point I am trying to make here is that, apparent within my interviews at least, the 'job' of farming made up a huge part of the answer to the biggest existential question anyone ever really faces: 'who am I?'

My own answer to the query of when, or if, we are ever done 'growing up' is that we don't really grow *up*, but rather we grow *out*. Growing 'up' suggests that something is left behind, abandoned or unable to carry on. Growing 'out' feels more realistic – we acquire layers to ourselves. Consider this extract from *The Anthropocene Reviewed*, a series of, you guessed it, reviews, of all manner of banal things. On the 'World's Largest Ball of Paint', the author writes:

"*The world's largest ball of paint is located in the tiny town of Alexandria, Indiana. Back in 1977, Mike Carmichael painted a baseball with his three-year-old son. And then they kept painting it. Carmichael told Roadside America, "My intention was to paint maybe a thousand*

coats on it and then maybe cut it in half and see what it looked like. But then it got to the size where it looked kinda neat, and all my family said keep painting it." Carmichael also invited friends and family over to paint the ball, and eventually strangers started showing up, and Mike would have them paint it, too." (Green, 2021: 134)

Growing 'out' is the layering upon layering that happens as we grow. As I discussed in Chapters 2 and 4, we are composed of relationships. Thus, our relationships with others form a huge part of how we enact our identities, our answers to 'who am I?'. How others perceive us, how we understand our roles, our jobs, our selves, is a kaleidoscope of other people just as much as it is a kaleidoscope of ourselves. Others – people, places, politics etc. – paint layers on us just as much as we paint them on ourselves. For many farmers, the layers that form who they are have been agriculturally-coloured since childhood, rather than representative of a new palette acquired when starting a career as an adult. Even for those who are not generational farmers, the decision to farm is often one that calls to some deeper layer, painted so early on that it's hard to remember what it was about that colour that made one want to roll in it.

It's this sort of pondering on identity and on relationships as ontological reality that led me to the 'good farmer' literature. I found this concept a helpful one for exploring how broader contexts and changes impacted farmers' sense of self, their understanding of their work as part of this, and how the role of 'farmer' is evaluated on a relational, cultural level in terms of what is 'good'. As identified by Burton et al., the 'good farmer' concept is helpful as:

"*a mirror reflecting the imperfections of the transformations promoted by powerful agents, such as state agencies, international organisations, influential NGOs [non-governmental organisations], or dominant corporations*" (2021:11)

This aligns well with my overall aim in this thesis, to understand the influence of broader macro-changes on English farming life. As I discussed in Chapter 2, Bourdieu's social theory served as a useful functional tool for 'taking apart' this identity concept and examining it further.

Wider literature has established the importance of profitability to both farming in general (Lobley and Potter 2004) and to the 'good farmer' identity (Topp et al., 2024; Sutherland, 2013). This paper takes this further, however, by identifying how the need to be 'business savvy' is of growing importance to being a 'good farmer'. How this is metabolised within individual farmer's identities is explored. By identifying the skill of market responsiveness

as a way to accrue embodied, cultural capital (in a managerial form – Burton, 2004; Burton et al., 2008; Burton and Paragahawewa, 2011) this paper makes an original contribution to scholarship on farming identity. Drawing on the 'taste of necessity' (Bourdieu, 1984; Sutherland, 2013) allows this paper to identify the interplay between economic and policy contexts, the rising importance of business acumen to farming success, and how these integrate within conceptions of what a 'good farmer' is in this day and age.

Policy really comes to the fore here – discussions on the changes to policy discussed in Chapter 2 revealed novel insights, some of which were explored in Chapter 5. Interestingly, the perspectives given by some interviewees diverged slightly from those portrayed in wider literature (Cusworth and Dodsworth, 2021). The existence of 'bad' farmers is something touched on but not often further developed within good farmer scholarship (there are exceptions to this – see Green et al., 2020; Cusworth, 2020). Conversations with interviewees about policy found that some saw policy change as a way for 'bad farmers' to be removed from the field. Some, however, saw policy changes and increased competitiveness as a bad thing, working to drive good farmers out of business, showing a tension in different understandings of what a good farmer is, and how important business acumen and market responsiveness can be in different interpretations of this. This is a particularly original perspective put forward by this paper. The literature covered in my pre-field work stages also comes through here, as this paper discusses the role of 'productivism' in the 'good farmer' identity (Burton, 2004). By building on and contributing to literature which examines the role of productivism in the 'good farmer' identity, I outline how, when we really hone in on how productivism is actually defined, its impact on current farming is complex and blurry.

References

Bourdieu, P. (1984) *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste* (Harvard University Press)

Burton, R J F. (2004) Seeing through the 'good farmer's' eyes: towards developing an understanding of the social symbolic value of 'productivist' behaviour, *Sociologia Ruralis* (44)

Burton, R J F., Forney, J., Stock, P., Sutherland, L-A. (2021) *The Good Farmer: Culture and Identity in Food and Agriculture* (Routledge, Earthscan)

Burton, R J F., Kuczera, C., Schwarz, G. (2008) Exploring farmers' cultural resistance to voluntary agri-environmental schemes, *Sociologia Ruralis* (48)

Burton, R J F., Paragahawewa, U H. (2011) Creating culturally sustainable agri-environmental schemes, *Journal of Rural Studies* (27)

Cusworth G., Dodsworth, J. (2021) Using the 'good farmer' concept to explore agricultural attitudes to the provision of public goods. A case study of participants in an English agri-environmental scheme, *Agriculture and Human Values* (38)

Cusworth, G. (2020) Falling short of being the 'good farmer': Losses of social and cultural capital incurred through environmental mismanagement, and the long-term impacts agri-environmental scheme participation, *Journal of Rural Studies* (75)

Gray, J. (1998) Family farms in the Scottish borders: a practical definition by hill farmers, *Journal of Rural Studies* (14:3)

Green, J. (2021) *The Anthropocene Reviewed: Essays on a Human-Centred Planet* (Penguin Random House)

Green, L., Kaler, J., Liu, N., Ferguson, E. (2020) Influencing Change: When "Best Practice" Changes and the Prototypical Good Farmer Turns Bad, *Veterinary Humanities and Social Sciences* (7)

Johnsen, S. (2003) Contingency revealed: New Zealand farmer's experiences of agricultural restructuring, *Sociologia Ruralis* (43:2)

Lloyd, C. (2026) *'It's not just a career or a job, it's a way of life';* vocational habitus and preparing students to work in farming, *Journal of Education and Work* (no volume)

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

Sullivan, S., McCann, E., De Young, R., Erickson, D. (1996) Farmers' attitudes about farming and the environment: A survey of conventional and organic farmers, *Journal of Agricultural and Environmental Ethics* (9)

Sutherland, L-A. (2013) Can organic farmers be 'good farmers'? Adding the 'taste of necessity' to the conventionalization debate, *Agriculture and Human Values* (30)

Topp, E., Stephan, A., Varela, E., Cicek, H., Plieninger, T. (2024) Mediterranean farmers' understandings of 'good soil management' and 'good farmer' identity in the context of conservation agriculture, *International Journal of Agricultural Sustainability* (22:1)

"You can only embrace it because you're not going to stop it. Why not embrace what's coming?": Reconfiguration of 'Good Farmer' Identity and the Skill of Market Responsiveness in English Agriculture

Abstract: This paper uses Bourdieu's social theory and the 'good farmer' concept to analyse how English farmer identities respond to increased economic pressure and recent post-Brexit policy change. Drawing on semi-structured interviews with a range of English farmers, this paper finds growing recognition of the importance of being a 'business-minded' farmer. Market responsiveness is identified as an embodied cultural skill which is increasingly valued albeit in different ways depending on how other 'good farmer' values are weighted within an individual's habitus. Individual-level contradictions which evidence the 'divided self' in response to these changes are discussed. Analysis finds that, for a significant proportion of interviewees, economic independence is framed as a symbolic virtue, reflecting the moralisation of market survival. A sub-group of interviewees saw the removal of previous subsidies as a way for 'bad farmers' (those who do not operate commercially viable farms capable of financial sustainability) to be removed from the field. This paper finds that some farmers reject a 'public goods provider' identity, with policy change becoming a catalyst for a more neoliberal, market-oriented perspective on the 'good farmer'. This finding allows for further discussion on the changing role of 'productivism' in the 'good farmer' identity, especially regarding sources of financial payment (state or market), what behaviour these payments encourage, and the increased influence this affords non-agricultural actors in defining who the 'good farmer' is.

Keywords: Good Farmer Identity, Productivism, Post-Brexit Agricultural Policy, Market Actor, English Farming

1. Introduction

English agriculture is undergoing significant change, characterised by policy reform, shifting societal expectations, economic pressures, and growing corporate influence. Following Brexit, England has introduced Environmental Land Management Schemes (ELMS) and the Basic Payments Scheme, a major component of income for many farms, is being phased out. ELMS is based on a 'payment for public goods' model (Kam et al., 2023) marking a 'ramping up' of previous European Union (EU) level shifts away from protectionist

agricultural policy and towards more agri-environmental schemes (Winter, 2000; Dobbs and Pretty, 2008).

ELMS seeks to create farm businesses that are "profitable and economically sustainable without subsidy" (DEFRA, 2020: 7). However, this occurs within an increasingly difficult economic context characterised by low commodity prices, rising input costs, and limited farmer control within corporate-dominated agri-food systems (Taverner, 2025; AHDB, 2022; Barlow and Lostak, 2023; Seth and Randall, 2020; Jack and Hammans, 2022; The Food Foundation, 2025). These changes shape both the practical realities of English agriculture and farmers' understandings of their roles and values. Previous research highlights a divergence between policy assumptions about farmers' motivations and farmers' own perspectives (Brown et al., 2021). The 'good farmer' literature exemplifies this interplay between farmer identities and agri-environmental scheme uptake (Burton and Paragahawewa, 2011; Riley, 2016; Cusworth and Dodsworth, 2021), changing societal demands (Saunders, 2016) and the neoliberal economic landscape (Haggerty et al., 2009).

This latter paper examines the impact of neoliberalism on sheep farmer subjectivities in New Zealand. In an agricultural context, neoliberalism is defined as when "the role of the state in regional and national agricultural governance has been gradually replaced by consumer- and industry-driven environmental regulation initiatives in certain market sections" (Haggerty et al., 2009: 768). On a broader level, this paper draws on Harvey's definition of neoliberalism, as the belief that "human well being can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterised by strong private property rights, free markets and free trade" (Harvey, 2007: 11). This paper uses the 'good farmer' concept alongside Bourdieusian social theory to analyse the interplay between policy change, economic shifts, and farmer identities.

I begin with outlining the theoretical framework (Section 2) and methodological approach (Section 3) used in this research. Empirical findings are presented (Section 4) covering how business acumen is noted as increasingly important for farming success (Section 4.1), and market responsiveness is thus becoming valued as a form of embodied, cultural skill (Section 4.2). The extent to which various farmers perceive this skill as necessary for being a 'good farmer' is discussed, as well as a contrasting perspective held by two participants who instead framed market price through the lens of 'luck' (Enticott et al., 2021). How this increased recognition of the 'good farmer' as the 'good' market actor is shaped and constrained by

other ‘good farmer’ ideals is examined (Section 4.3), as well as moments of internal contradiction within individual participant narratives (Section 4.4). Section 4.5 looks at how farmers discuss changes to agricultural policy, finding that whilst frustration was expressed towards any form of autonomy limiting intervention, this was higher towards government policy than it was towards supply chain related governance. Just under a quarter of participants viewed recent policy changes as a way to remove ‘bad farmers’ (those whose farms are not commercially viable without subsidy) from the field.

In Section 5, I draw out the broader arguments emerging from this research and situate these within the wider literature. Analysis finds that, for a significant proportion of interviewees, economic independence is framed as a symbolic virtue, reflecting the moralisation of market survival. However, even participants who espouse the value of the entrepreneurial, market oriented farmer, identify concerns with the overall trajectory of the industry, potentially signalling the existence of the ‘divided self’ (Shortall et al., 2018: 585). In response to the work of Cusworth and Dodsworth (2021), who uncover how farmers integrate the ‘public goods provider’ into their pre-existing identities, this paper finds that some farmers reject this ‘public goods provider’ identity with policy change becoming a catalyst for a more neoliberal, market-oriented perspective on the ‘good farmer’. This finding allows for further discussion on the changing role of ‘productivism’ in the ‘good farmer’ identity, especially regarding sources of financial payment (state or market), what behaviour these payments encourage, and the increased influence this affords non-agricultural actors in defining who the ‘good farmer’ is.

2. Conceptualising the ‘Good Farmer’

The term ‘good farmer’ has become an important conceptual tool for understanding farmer behaviour, gathering significant traction since the 1990s (Fairweather and Keating, 1994; Phillips and Gray, 1995; Harrison et al., 1998). Burton’s research further contributed to its development through his work when being a ‘good farmer’ emerged as a reasoning for why farmers did not consider forestry to be akin to farming (2004a). The ‘good farmer’ identity has developed alongside the ‘cultural turn’ within social science, where greater attention has been paid to how culture, meaning, symbols, and discourses produce social life (Cloke, 1997). Previous focus on farmers as rational actors seeking profit-maximisation has seen much critique within agrarian studies (Hill and Bradley, 2024). The ‘good farmer’ concept

has been particularly useful in moving beyond an understanding of farmers as 'homo economicus' (Wilson, 2008: 369; Burton, 2004a, 2004b).

Despite this, economic viability remains a core aspect of what it means to be a 'good farmer' although scholars emphasise that this is by far the only variable at play (Topp et al., 2024; Sutherland, 2013; Burton et al., 2008). The role of productivism within the 'good farmer' identity has been repeatedly stressed, although, as shall be explored later, there is both continuity and change regarding the productivist mindset within farming cultures (Silvasti, 2003; Cusworth and Dodsworth, 2021; Topp et al., 2024; Saunders, 2016; McGuire et al., 2015; Saugeres, 2002). Research analysing the 'good farmer' identity and productivism often focuses on how productivist symbols, communicating high yield and thus profitability, are expressed in the farm landscape (Stock, 2007; Sutherland and Burton, 2011).

The most commonly cited definition of productivism is "a commitment to an intensive, industrially driven and expansionist agriculture with state support based primarily on output and increased productivity" (Lowe et al., 1993: 221). Burton's seminal paper makes specific mention of this definition, directly questioning how to distinguish between productivism as an outcome of state support and productivism as "simply an inherent feature of commercial agriculture" (2004a: 197). However, later 'good farmer' texts have largely addressed productivism in relation to the agricultural practices it encourages rather than the sources of influence, with definitions, when given, focusing on the attainment of high yields and high input usage (Saunders, 2016; Cusworth and Dodsworth, 2021; Leitschuh et al., 2022; McGuire et al., 2015; Miller-Klugesherz and Sanderson, 2023) in pursuit of profit maximisation (McGuire et al., 2015). An identity rooted in food production is also central, although this motivation expands beyond productivism (Cusworth and Dodsworth, 2021).

'Good farmer' itself is an analytical concept, not a theoretical one (Burton et al., 2021: 67). It was observed as a pattern within empirical data (for example, within Burton's (2004a) work on farming and forestry) and so 'good farmer' thus functions as a descriptive lens for a recurring social pattern. More theoretical scaffolding is required for understanding why this pattern exists and how it might operate, resulting in 'good farmer' literature employing a range of theoretical approaches. By far the most widespread theoretical framing, which this paper also employs, draws on Bourdieu's social theory. Bourdieu's framework offers a multi-scalar approach, allowing for macro-level economic pressures which shape the 'rules of the

game' to be linked to practical dimensions of culture which are pertinent to the study of farming (Burton et al., 2021: 79).

2.1 The 'Good Farmer' and Bourdieusian Theory

There are three core elements of Bourdieu's social theory: field, habitus, and capital. These are explored in turn. When Bourdieu discussed 'fields' he was referring to various social spaces; we all inhabit multiple fields. Fields are unique, having "their own rules, histories, star players, legends and lore" (Thomson, 2008: 83). Bourdieu viewed fields as arenas of struggle where actors compete for positions within a social hierarchy. These fields operate according to certain 'rules of the game', with actors competing for dominance within fields through capital accumulation.

Bourdieu described habitus as a "system of long lasting and transposable dispositions which, integrating past experiences, function at every moment as a matrix of perceptions, appreciations and actions" (Bourdieu, 1977: 82). He developed the concept to understand how behaviour is "regulated" outside of simple "obedience to rules" (Bourdieu, 1994: 65), pinpointing a conceptual bridge between individual agency and broader social structures (Jenkins, 2024: 74). One's habitus develops over time, formed by experiences, but it is more than simply one's social background (Maton, 2008). Through the accumulation of experience and knowledge, the habitus forms a lens through which the individual views the social, allowing for "generative schemes" which inform practice (Bourdieu, 1990: 66). Therefore, habitus is not simply practice or acts, but the logics which inform such acts (Maton, 2008). The classic phrase used to communicate habitus more simply is that it allows the individual to develop a "feel for the game" (Bourdieu, 1990: 66) dependent on the social fields one is present within. Habitus is described as "durable, but not eternal" (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992: 133) as, over time, experiences and placement within social fields allow for the dispositions which inform habitus to evolve. Neither the field nor the habitus, which are co-constitutive, are effective analytical tools if used in isolation; it is their dynamic interactions which form a core aspect of Bourdieu's theory (Bourdieu, 1998: vii).

Bourdieu uses the term 'capital' to move beyond the traditional understanding of capital as purely economic. There are three fundamental forms of capital (economic, social, and cultural), the reproduction of which can allow for actors to better their standing within a field's hierarchy. Economic capital corresponds to the traditional understanding of capital, the sole focus of which Bourdieu sought to move beyond. Bourdieu defines social capital as

the “aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to the possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalised relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition – in other words, to membership in a group – which provides each of its members with the backing of the collectively-owned capital” (Bourdieu, 1986: 21). Social interactions enable the reproduction of social capital; the larger the social network, the greater the volume of capital available for leverage. Different social groups will contain varying aggregate amounts of capital available for leverage. Just as group membership and social interaction can offer positive access to capital, the inverse can also occur, where social relations can incur isolation and exclusion from a particular group (Putnam, 2001).

Cultural capital, that which is culturally valued, contains three ‘sub types’; institutional, objectified, and embodied (Bourdieu, 1986). Institutional denotes formal certification(s) of competence, an agricultural example of this would be the traits that breed societies recognize as indicators of livestock quality (Yarwood and Evans, 2006; Holloway, 2005). Objectified cultural capital refers to material objects that are highly valued within a particular group. A particular form of machinery, for example, although ownership only attains cultural value when accompanied by the skill or expertise required for its operation. Embodied cultural capital consists of lasting physical and mental dispositions acquired through sustained effort over time, such as particular skills or knowledges. In farming, this may look like knowing when to intervene and when to simply observe an individual ewe during lambing. Burton et al. have developed the theory surrounding embodied cultural capital, identifying three ‘conditions’ required for an activity to display embodied cultural capital:

“Firstly, the activity must require a skilled role performance capable of differentiating 'poor' and 'good' performances; that is, it must embody the level of cultural capital of the operator. Secondly, this skill must, in some way, be manifest in the outcome of the activity - that is, there must be outward signs that an efficacious action has been performed (for example, straight lines in the landscape may reflect motoric skills). Thirdly, these outward signs of skill must be visible or otherwise accessible to other members of the farming community.” (2008:20)

Burton and colleagues have further delineated the subtype of embodied cultural capital into three types specific to farming: motoric, mechanical and managerial (Burton, 2004a; Burton et al., 2008; Burton and Paragahawewa, 2011). Motoric (e.g. skilled operating of machinery) and mechanical (e.g. the maintaining and setting up of machinery) are less relevant for this

paper (Riley and Robertson, 2022: 160). Managerial – doing the right task at the right time – is particularly relevant, as will be discussed.

Capital forms are dynamic, for example, objectified cultural capital risks being devalued if use of a particular machine 'fails' at one of the above conditions (Burton and Paragahawewa, 2011). Symbolic capital is what allows differing forms of capital to be converted. Similarly to how money operates as a recognised value signifier, symbolic capital functions as the form various forms of capital acquire when others recognise them as legitimate (Bourdieu, 1989: 17). Economic, social or cultural capital can be converted into symbolic capital, enabling those with a shared habitus to recognise their significance (Bourdieu, 1998: 100).

Bourdieu also integrated the concept of 'taste' into this social theory (1984), identifying both 'taste of necessity' and 'taste of luxury', referring to how cultural capital is valued in relation to modes of production. Those far removed from the reality of production are more likely to have a 'taste for luxury', where what is culturally valued is distanced from functionality, such as art pieces. In contrast, the 'taste of necessity' is where culturally valued objects more readily reflect economic restraints. Bourdieu illustrates this with the example of cheaper food with a higher calorie content being preferred by those of lower socio-economic backgrounds (Bourdieu, 1984: 173). Sutherland (2013) drew on this aspect of Bourdieu's theory to argue that it is a 'taste of necessity' which characterises the symbols valued within modern farming culture. As it is understood that fields without weeds generate greater income, they become more culturally valued as symbols of 'good farming'. The 'taste of necessity' is present because the functional qualities of the landscape are what generates its symbolic value.

One of the core critiques levelled against Bourdieu's work is its inability to predict and understand change (Yang, 2014; Jenkins, 2024). Within the good farmer literature, however, change and cultural diversity have been more readily addressed. Multiple "agri-cultures" have been observed (Morris and Evans, 1999) and some level of fragmentation can occur regarding who is viewed as a 'good farmer' and why (Sutherland and Darnhofer, 2012). Features of 'good farming', as argued by Sutherland and Darnhofer (2012) and Riley (2016), vary across regions and in relation to the type of commodity being produced. When the 'rules of the game' change, individuals must adapt through "creative responses" (Sutherland and Darnhofer, 2012: 234). Those in higher positions within the hierarchy, by virtue of greater capital access, are better placed to influence field reconfiguration in ways that sustains their own dominant position.

Sutherland and Darnhofer theorise that as the 'rules of the game' shift in today's agricultural context, the resulting creative responses lead to increased diversity in farming practice, thereby increasing diversity in what defines a 'good farmer' (2012: 234). 'Good farmer' literature which examines organic farming has also proved fruitful for understanding how identities adapt and change. Sutherland and Darnhofer (2012) found that organic farming became more accepted as it became more profitable. They argue that as economic duress occurs, the link between economic and cultural capital becomes "tightened" and symbols are devalued if they are no longer conducive to profit (2012: 235). Sutherland (2013) extends this, drawing once more on data from organic and conventional farmers. She finds that the "'taste of necessity' forges a direct connection between" economic and cultural capital, as financial pressures require farmers to re-assess what they consider 'good farming' to be, enabling changes in what is culturally valued (2013: 438).

Sutherland and Darnhofer theorise that "the dynamics of the 'rules of the game' in the agricultural field have simultaneously led to a broadening of the 'good farming' ideal, and to a fragmentation, whereby individual farmers prioritise a subset of this broad range" (2012: 232). This theorisation serves as a useful framing for both changing 'good farmer' identities and the literature which aims to study it: complexity, change and continuity all characterise the evolving understanding of the 'good farmer'. Further literature has also found levels of fragmentation within farmer groups (Shortall et al., 2018; Naylor et al., 2016; Hunt, 2010). Literature is also placing greater emphasis on the role of non-farmer peers in shaping what is considered the 'good farmer'. Engagement in "para or non-agricultural fields" (Sutherland and Darnhofer, 2012: 238) is receiving growing scholarly attention (Miller-Klugesherz and Sanderson, 2023). Vigors et al. find that farmers show increased awareness over how they are "externally assessed" by consumers, policy actors and retailers (2023: 163). Whilst the 'good farmer' identity is broadening and adapting, this is not without tension or difficulty (Leitschuh et al., 2022) and definitions remain in flux (Sutherland and Darnhofer, 2012: 236).

Agri-environmental schemes have been a particular focus of 'good farmer' literature. Burton et al. (2008) drew on Bourdieu's capital concepts in their work on farmers' resistance to agri-environmental schemes. Their study concluded that farmers may experience a net capital loss, even if financially remunerated, if engagement in an agri-environmental scheme requires them to engage in activities which do not generate symbolic capital. Building on this work, Burton and Paragahawewa (2011) outline how farmers risk losing access to social

capital by engagement with such schemes, as conservation practices produce diverse landscapes which can be read as 'messy' by peers.

Agri-environmental schemes may have been culturally incompatible at the time of Burton et al.'s (2008) research, but studies have since found that farmers have taken an "if you cannot beat 'em join 'em" approach (Riley, 2016: 68), integrating activities relating to agri-environmental schemes into their conception of what it means to be a 'good farmer'. Cusworth and Dodsworth (2021) used repeat interviews with farmers in their study, finding that farmers were increasingly willing to adapt to the 'public goods' model which previous research had termed "not culturally sustainable" (Burton and Paragahawewa, 2011: 95). Cusworth and Dodsworth are keen to stress that it is not that the productivist identity, previously framed as the antithesis to agri-environmental scheme approaches, is being erased – they found food production was still prioritised when possible (and still enabled cultural capital to be attained) – but that the "'public goods provider' identity has been integrated – or, more accurately, has been given good room to co-exist – with the extant productivist farming identity" (2021: 936). It was the enduring nature of "good farming = profitable farming", a feature of the productivist mindset, that created the conditions under which newer symbols of 'good farming' can develop (Sutherland and Darnhofer, 2012: 235; Shortall et al., 2018).

3. Methods

This research draws on 41 interviews with farmers across England in 2023, with a range of farm types and sizes represented. A regional internet search, primarily using Yellow Pages, was used to identify potential respondents, although some word of mouth and snowball sampling also occurred. Sampling concluded once saturation was reached. Initial contact was made via email, telephone, or post and in-person interviews followed, which lasted approximately one to two hours. 33 out of 41 of the interviews were conducted with one individual, but eight interviews included a secondary participant. Demographic information and written consent were collected from the primary participant, with verbal consent confirmed by any secondary participant present.

This research uses a non-representative sample of farmers, although a range of types, sizes and routes to market are present. Farm sizes ranged from under 20 hectares to over 100 hectares. The sample included 11 mixed farms, 18 livestock farms (four mixed livestock, five beef, five dairy, two sheep, one goat, one egg production), seven arable and five horticultural. Participants ranged from their 20s to their 80s, with representation across early-

, mid-, and later-career farmers, although no participant had been farming for less than 5 years. Interviewees were geographically diverse with the North East (five), North West (12), the Midlands (six), South East (eight), and South West (ten) areas represented.

Route to market refers to whether the business sells agricultural products into commercial supply chains and/or direct-to-consumer sales, with the category of produce also noted (food or non-food agricultural produce such as hay or biofuel crops). 30 farmers sold directly into commercial supply chains, six sold direct to consumer, two sold both direct to consumer and into commercial supply chains, and one farm operated solely as a charitable organisation with produce donated to local charities and food banks. Two interviews were conducted with semi-retired farmers. Both were still residing on and engaged with their farms, but most farm work was contracted out. Historically, one had sold direct-to-consumer and the other into commercial supply chains, and their discussions related to their time when engaged with this route to market, rather than what was undertaken by contract farmers on their land. The study adhered to principles of informed consent, confidentiality, and participant anonymity, and received ethical approval from Lancaster University. Anonymity is ensured using numerical identifiers for participants (e.g. P1, P2).

This research aimed to centre farmers' voices and allowed flexibility in topic discussion. I aimed to uncover farmers' motivations and the challenges they felt they were facing, especially in relation to recent changes in policy direction and increasing economic pressures. Discussions were conversational and participant-led and encouraged the disclosure of "spontaneous information" (Gilbert, 2001: 126) rather than a rigid focus on assumed influences over farming practice. Each interview covered specific themes: farmer history; history of the farmland and enterprise; motivations for farming and what being a farmer means to the individual; policy impact; increased focus on sustainability within farm practice; predictions for the future of farming both on an individual and industry-wide scale.

The first two themes were explored to allow for a holistic, qualitative method of enquiry to be developed, rather than a broader, more abstract perspective which is seen within quantitative methods (Sutherland, 2010: 417). When possible, interviews were conducted whilst walking around the farm, but this was not always an option depending on interviewee preference. Grounded theory was employed in this research to centre farmers' perspectives (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). This approach enabled narratives and conclusions to be co-constructed between those with contextual expertise and the traditionally hegemonic 'expert' (Riley and

Harvey, 2005). I chose to use an interpretivist grounded theory approach, which allows prior theoretical sensitivity to inform analysis, rather than bracketing existing knowledge entirely, thereby strengthening contextual depth and analytical rigour (Sebastian, 2019).

Interviews were transcribed and coded both manually and using NVivo. Open coding identified initial themes, in line with grounded theory methodology (Chun Tie et al., 2019). Several rounds of advanced coding followed. Iterative comparison across participant characteristics was undertaken to identify potential patterns. This was done for all perspectives discussed, if no particular pattern is identified in the text, it should be assumed that none was found. This research presents qualitatively rich analysis which explores how farmers articulate and interpret the shifting agricultural landscape. The aim of this work is theoretically informed interpretive analysis, rather than statistical generalisations.

4. Findings

4.1 Increased Importance of the 'Business-Minded' Farmer

The 'good farmer' literature has consistently identified profitability as a core component of what it means to be a 'good farmer' (Topp et al., 2024; Sutherland, 2013) and this data supports this perspective. However, the data also reveals an evolving emphasis within farmers' accounts: seven participants explicitly commented on the *growing* importance of business acumen for farming success, for example:

"People who are, for example farming nowadays, it's not a farmer, farmer. It's a business. It's a business, I'm afraid." P7

"When I started growing potatoes in the '80s, there were 45,000 potato growers in the country. There are now under 2,000. That has happened in all aspects of farming, because we need to be more efficient, we need to be good at it and we need to be really business minded." P9

Of the 41 farmers interviewed, 34 discussed the importance of business acumen to the success of their farm. Three broad perspectives were present: a reluctant acceptance of the importance of running the farm as a business (a perspective held by eight farmers), framing skilled business management as necessary to the overall running of the farm but not what makes someone a 'good' farmer (expressed by six), and endorsement of business acumen as part of what makes a farmer 'good' or 'successful' (the majority perspective, expressed by twenty participants). These differing perspectives point to ongoing negotiation over what

forms of competence are culturally valued within the farming field. 19 farmers expressed that profitability was vital, not just to be a 'good' farmer, but to be able to farm at all. Shifting 'rules of the game' were identified, with 21 respondents noting that profitability was becoming harder. This suggests a tightening relationship between economic viability and symbolic recognition, where economic capital becomes increasingly central not only for survival, but also for maintaining legitimacy within the field (Sutherland, 2013). Four participants also noted that financial buoyancy was increasingly required for resilience through patches of economic duress and market volatility, for example:

"It's a grim time, you know, we're suffering, we're really suffering financially at the moment. It's just not being paid enough money. So we can survive on cash because all of our investments here are chucking cash off. Assuming we've got crops to put through them. But, you know, a lot of people can't, you know, it is grim. We are losing money at the orchard level. The whole industry is." P28

"Commodity prices- I mean, last year, because of the Russian issue, commodity prices went through the roof, and we had a very good year, and we got terribly encouraged. This year, the prices have come crashing down but our costs didn't drop. Nobody brought down the price of diesel. We've got a very good financial grip on it, so we analyse things very carefully. And the fact is that- I mean, we're lucky, because of various reasons, mostly because we were in industry, we can have a bad year and shrug it off. But I know I've got neighbours, they only have to have one bad year and they're finished." P36

The farmers quoted here were able to 'survive' or 'shrug off' patches of economic difficulty because of their pre-established commercial success. P28's farming business was already successful prior to the current period of economic adversity, and P36 had accrued wealth in his prior career in non-agricultural business, providing a degree of insulation from current financial duress. Sixteen farmers interviewed mentioned that previous or ongoing non-farm income was something important for the resilience of their business. When read in Bourdieusian terms, this illustrates how those with greater accumulated capital are more resilient in times of field reconfiguration, and thus more likely to retain their positions within the social hierarchy. Farmers with income (historical or ongoing) from non-farming sources are more likely to remain in farming and, consequently, better positioned to achieve 'good farmer' status and shape what is valued within the field. However, it should be noted that other 'good farmer' literature finds that 'part-time' or 'hobby' farmers are less respected

within farming fields (Sutherland, 2019), acting as a constraint on the positives to be gained from non-farming income.

Discussions on the increased need for business related skills uncovered the growing influence of non-agricultural actors on what being a 'good farmer' entails. In Bourdieusian terms, this reflects an increasing overlap between the agricultural field and adjacent supply-chain fields, where actors such as retailers and buyers are able to shape the 'rules of the game' despite not being farmers themselves (Burton et al., 2021: 133). Eleven interviewees noted the importance of retaining a good buyer for their produce and how a reliable customer can support a farm business through difficult economic patches, for example:

"*Having the customer base that we have, we made it. They supported us through what was a very tricky time…The message is they [Marks and Spencer] supported us, their grower base, and protected it so the next year and the year after, and the year after and the year after, the grower base is still here. If they'd gone, "Can't afford it, too expensive, leave it empty." the grower goes into bankruptcy."* P15

One participant did discuss the difficulties he has had when being 'tied in' to one customer base:

"If that relationship goes wrong or the power balance is not quite right, you're in trouble. So, I deliberately have perhaps 20 customers…Because I can fall out with one of them bigtime, and it won't affect the business. In fact, I'm just in the process of falling out with one of them…They employ a buyer who has no concept of what it costs to grow an apple. He sees his role purely as finding the cheapest fruit all the time. He has no concept of a longer-term relationship. He's not reliable. He doesn't do what he says. He'll wriggle his way out of contracts, even written contracts, and it's just a total nightmare. He needs to be taken down a peg or two, so I turned him down yesterday." P31

This quote illustrates the vulnerable position farmers can have within supply chains, and the power a buyer can have if they are the main point of sale for agricultural produce. From a Bourdieusian perspective, this reflects an unequal distribution of capital within the field, where buyers are able to leverage their economic position to exert influence over farming practices. The influence of supply chain actors was also seen through a rise in demands placed on farmers to adhere to non-governmental schemes and regulations (Busch, 2011; Campbell, 2013). These supply-chain led schemes dictated what a 'good farmer' should look like, such as engagement with local schools (P31) or keeping a calf with a dairy cow (P30),

and were framed within these interviews as frustrating and difficult to implement. The importance of a reliable, long-standing relationship with a buyer who values such schemes means that their perspective of a 'good farmer' must be taken into account. However, this may sit uneasily with farmers' own habitus, particularly where these externally imposed expectations do not align with their culturally embedded understandings of what constitutes 'good farming'.

4.2 Market Responsiveness as Embodied, Cultural Capital

Besides the importance of securing and retaining customers, farmers also mentioned that good leadership and staff management, attention to detail, and the ability to manage risk were valuable skills within this 'business-minded' approach to farming. By far the most frequently mentioned skill, however, mentioned by 17 participants, was that of responsiveness to market volatility. An example of this, to illustrate, is:

"*But if you are light on your feet, and keep politics in the back of your head all the time. Like, okay, so buying fuel. So, this week, the fuel price has come down. Now, we have got some diesel tanks, which we fill up with 20,000L of diesel. We can make a bit of money, if we get it right…it's called farming by the seat of your pants. Which means that you have to be light on your feet, and you have to have a smell for it*." P12

This quote outlines how this skill has become something embedded in this participant's habitus – it has become part of his 'feel for the game' or, as he says, he has developed "*a smell for it*". The ability to respond quickly to market signals was found to have become increasingly valued within farming communities as a form of embodied cultural capital, specifically a managerial form (the ability to do the right thing at the right time). There was no clear pattern of differentiation between the importance of market responsiveness and farm size, route to market, farmer age and farmer experience. Among the small number of dairy (five) and horticultural (five) farmers interviewed, this perspective was far more common, with four out of five mentioning it in each category. However, given the limited subgroup sizes, this pattern should be interpreted cautiously.

The development of this skill is a process of trial and error. P8, a horticultural farmer, outlined this in more detail:

"*The key thing with making money with soft fruit is yes, you want decent yield, a decent yield and at cost but the key thing is to match demand and supply. Because if you know about*

economics it's marginal costs so if my customers want say 1,000 punnets and I have 2,000 punnets the only way I will sell them is by reducing the price. You don't want to do that because your margin just goes to pot. We started, because of the quality, we really tried to get the quality right so that we had very good demand." P8

This example shows how P8 must be skilled not just in producing good quality soft fruit, but the right amounts at the same time. P8 detailed the various challenges he had faced with this, specifically related to water quality, plant varieties and mildew. Key here is that this 'market responsiveness skill' is not just a solely business-related ability, but the ability to integrate farming and market know-how together. This was something touched on by P12, who noted that people with "*BScs, and honours, and degrees, and letters behind their name*" lack the practical experience needed to make a successful farm business operate. This reflects a distinction between institutional cultural capital (formal qualifications) and embodied cultural capital (practical, experience-based knowledge), with the latter positioned as vital for success within the farming field. P8, the horticultural farmer mentioned above, was very honest about his long-term struggles to make a profit and the processes of trial and error he has gone through, expressing considerable emotion about the experience:

"What I'm trying to say I suppose is that some farmers are very good at what they do and can make a good living out of farming because they are exceptionally good. I don't put myself in that category. I put myself in the category where I've just been a bit bloody-minded and I was going to make a success of this. I put a lot of money in. It's now starting to come right. With anything in life if you are passionate about anything in life after a while…[he pauses to compose himself]…you make it work." P12

Original critiques of farmers as 'homo economicus', discussed in Section 2, are relevant here. This example outlines that, whilst farmers are not simply rational profit maximisers, field-level changes require increased engagement with economic logics for the 'farmer' in 'good farmer' to be preserved. P12's account reflects the role of habitus in shaping economic practice. His "*bloody-minded*" commitment and passion for farming point to deeply embedded dispositions which sustain engagement with the field, even in the face of financial difficulty. The development and valuation of market-related skills emerges as part of a broader drive to remain farming – if 'economic sense' were the dominant rationale at play, P12 would have likely quit farming altogether.

As discussed in Section 2, Burton et al. (2008) outlined three conditions which must be met for an activity to display embodied cultural capital. For the skill of market responsiveness, the third condition of visibility and/or accessibility is harder to identify, as the outcome is relatively 'hidden' in comparison to other culturally valued farming practice, referred to by Burton et al. as the "making private" of skilled role performances (2021: 169). However, as Sutherland et al. (2024) found in their study of poultry farmers, social interaction can be used as an alternative method of display for cultural skills. The same can be seen in relation to skilled market responsiveness, for example:

"*There are hundreds of really good farmers out there, or growers, really good. They grow the best crop spuds or an acre of wheat in the world, but they're crap businessmen. Their buying and selling is average and they don't make decisions quick enough to act on. There are still people who have got last year's wheat in the shed. You think, "Well, you silly bugger, you could have sold it for £300 a tonne." It's worth £168 today, and you think, "Wake up, get real."* P9

P9, an arable farmer, was a member of a cooperative which was able to bulk buy agricultural inputs to save money, but this often had to be done promptly, in response to high market volatility causing large price fluctuations. He expressed frustration at peers who do not understand the time-sensitive nature of these purchases:

"*The rest will phone up next week and say, "Is that deal still going?" You think, "You twat. You missed it." You just can't help some people. But that's what they're like, we're all different and I accept that.*"

This example illustrates one way that peers' market responsiveness abilities are judged through social interaction. P9 still described his peers as "*good farmers*" based on the quality of product they produce, even if they are "*crap businessmen*". This example suggests that, whilst responsiveness to a volatile market is integrated into the habitus of some farmers, it is not evenly present across the farming population, and other forms of cultural capital can 'make up' for poor performance in this area. The expression of "*we're all different and I accept that*" suggests that P9 remains able to accept his peers as 'good farmers' on their other merits, even if they have failed to perform this particular skill. P12 saw the ability to perform the skill of market responsiveness as a pre-requisite for being able to farm at all. He gave an example of a local non-agricultural businessman who had seen success in running retail

enterprises, where prices are more consistent, who had tried to go into soft fruit production. This new peer:

"*didn't really understand everything that was involved…Basically he didn't understand the timing of things and he got it all wrong. Right at the beginning of the season he didn't have enough fruit when the co-op*[9] *wanted fruit. Then when he did have fruit the co-op didn't take it so he had to dump a load. He got into a real…I felt sorry for him. He really got into a hell of a muddle and I think lost quite a lot of money. He gave it up."* P8

P8 didn't explicitly use the 'good farmer' framing, and was sympathetic to his peer's lack of success, but used this example to illustrate why, especially in the context of soft fruit production, market responsiveness is a foundational skill that is needed for farming (let alone 'good' farming) to continue. Other farmers saw the failure to respond and adapt to market demands as enough for someone to be labelled a 'bad' farmer:

"*The difference between good farmers and bad farmers is attention to detail. It's as simple as that. There's a lot of bad farmers… [Being a good farmer] means finding the extra one per cent. You know, what's happened in the food economy or the food supply chain is that the pressure to keep food prices low or drive them down, limit inflation in food prices and the ability to import lower-standard-food, grown to lower standards for less money, which has kept us very, very honest and driven as food producers, has meant that you've got to find different ways to do the job better…there's less space for the farmer's son to get involved in the farm. So that's definitely driving down the numbers and driving up the consolidation…Overall, it's a good thing. Because there are too many shit farmers. And we need a bit of a clear out, to be honest."* P28

These three examples (P8, P9, P28) show how farmers can lose a range of capital if they are unable to successfully perform skilled market adaptation. For P28, a farmer's inability to adapt to the shifting 'rules of the game' is sufficient to deny them the label of 'good farmer'. For P9, a farmer unable to respond adequately to market conditions might not be 'bad' or even 'not good', but certainly 'less good'. P8 did not deem his peer 'good' or 'bad', but rather outlined how, before one can be considered a 'good farmer', they must be able to remain farming and that sufficient skill in market responsiveness is needed for this. Whilst all three of these farmers' habitus value the same skill, the weighting of this valuation differs

[9] 'Co-op' in this context refers to a cooperative, not the food retailer

depending on contextual factors. P8 and P28 are both horticultural farmers (although P28 is part of a larger farming franchise which is mixed) whilst P9 is an arable farmer. Different farming types may place varying degrees of value on this skill, with their habitus adjusted specifically to the 'rules' of the field they operate within.

Two farmers did present contrasting perspectives on the value of agile adaptation to markets. P10, a sheep farmer who sells her livestock at market said:

"*We just take what comes. Whatever week you go in, you just take what they'll pay. And that's it sort of thing. Sometimes you're lucky and sometimes you're not."*

Similarly, P20, an arable farmer, noted:

"*we are members of [marketing cooperative name]. It goes into there, straight off the combine and it's sold through them, which they can have this year's harvest sold now, forward prices. Some you win, some you lose.*"

For these farmers, luck is a mediator for market price (for more on luck and the 'good farmer' see Enticott et al., 2021). In contrast, farmers who prioritise responsiveness to market volatility adopt a more critical stance towards such perspectives. During one interview, I mentioned 'Nogger's Blog', which is a resource which shows real-time price fluctuations for grain and key inputs (Noggers Blog, n.d.). P34, an arable farmer who viewed business acumen and market responsiveness as central to farming success, described the tool as underused, stating: "*It is concerning how people don't understand it and probably don't even do the basics of business.*" Here, P34's account moves beyond observation to implicit judgement of peers as falling short of what he considers the minimum competencies of a 'good farmer', particularly in relation to engaging with market volatility. Within P34's habitus, responsiveness to market volatility operates as a valued form of cultural capital. Farmers who fail to demonstrate this competence are limited in their ability to accrue symbolic capital through peer recognition.

P20, who had historical experience of dairy farming, recounted the experience of a late peer. This peer had a difficult cow who "*did her nut*" in the auctioneer ring, resulting in no bids from buyers. After trying another market with no success, this farmer took the cow back home again where it "*brayed him against the wall and killed him*". P20 explained what this experience illustrates to him:

"What it was, he thought it was worth a lot more than what he made at the mart. Me, if that had happened to me at [market one], it would have been dead on the Tuesday night. The trouble is they're frightened in case they don't get the full value. I've had them where I've gone for cows and you paid them what they were worth and, "Oh, it's worth more than that, more than that," but you only get what you can."

This example illustrates how "luck" can operate as a protective factor, tempering the pressure to maximise price that is so often tied to 'good farmer' status. Luck here mediates the stress – and potential deadly consequences – of pursuing a better price. This reflects a particular farming habitus, where experience has cultivated a 'feel for the game' that prioritises pragmatism and acceptance of market outcomes over attempts to maximise price. The story of a farmer killed by his cow becomes a parable to reinforce P20's belief that 'good farmers' accept the price they can get; a different aspect to market responsiveness. For P20, embodied skill lies in managing competing priorities and/or knowing when safety outweighs potential price, reflecting a form of embodied cultural capital grounded in experience-based judgement.

P20 also shared experiences where he feels peers have lied about the price they have received for their arable produce, noting that "*anybody says they've never had a bad crop [price] is a liar*". This underscores two things: the ability to obtain a good price functions as a form of symbolic capital within the field, valued to the extent that it is worth (potentially) lying about in order to maintain or accrue status; and that some farmers mediate this diversity in price through the 'luck' narrative – sanguinely accepting market volatility as part of the 'rules of the game', internalised within a farmer's habitus that recognises the limits of individual control within the field. For P20, the price given is not necessarily a reflection of skill, but rather the reality of farming.

4.3 Tensions between 'Good Farmer' Values

Whilst, overall, interviews showed an increasing willingness among farmers to value being a 'good' market actor as part of what makes a 'good' farmer, this valuation remained shaped by other 'good farmer' ideals, reflecting the limits of economic capital as a *sole* basis for symbolic recognition. Being 'too' profitable could be equated with being 'too greedy', as expressed by eight respondents, for example:

"*A lot of people – well, I know ones round this way – they want more and more land to try and get themselves out of debt…it's just greed. It's the same old story, a little fire will keep you warm, a big fire will burn your hands.*" P20

"*The people in the industry, the people you talk to, there is a tremendous lot of debt out there in the agricultural world. It's just self-inflicted. Is it greed? Money has been that easy to borrow, and so what do we do? "Oh, we'll borrow more. We'll borrow more."… How do you define a good farmer then? Do you define a good farmer by his bank balance and the farm going to wrack and ruin but being very successful financially? Or is a good farmer that keeps all his farm really tidy and…?*" P27

From a Bourdieusian perspective, this represents a form of symbolic boundary-making, where excessive profit-seeking is constructed as illegitimate, thereby constraining the conversion of economic capital into symbolic capital. How profitability and best practice are mediated was a common discussion point within interviews, reflecting an ongoing struggle over the relative value of different forms of capital. Farmers expressed a range of perspectives on this, depending on the context. 11 farmers argued that profit must not be pursued if doing so risks significant environmental or ethical harms. 21 felt that profitable food production and best practice could be achieved simultaneously. However, 15 argued that when the two are in conflict, profitability must be prioritised:

"And it would be lovely to plant for you to run through meadows with wildflowers, and stuff like that, but it isn't going to happen. Because they need to make a profit on what they're – this is the economics of capitalist society, and we need to make a profit. That's key. You can't do any environmental schemes without making a profit. And once there is a little bit of what I call fat in the system, you've got a little bit of fat, you're able to take on these schemes. If you are scratching for the bank manager, for the kids to go to school, or feed them…Let me assure you, the environmental scheme isn't in the ballpark." P12

There is, however, significant overlap between these groups, as 14 of the 31 interviewees who addressed the topic indicated that their approach would vary depending on the context and practice in question. Two farmers articulated all three positions, sometimes putting ethics above profit, being able to combine the two in others, and sometimes having to choose profitable farming practice over ethics. Five said they put ethics before profit in some cases and at other times were able to combine the two effectively, and seven said they were able to combine ethical farming with profitable practice some of the time, but not always. The fact

that this topic arose in just over three-quarters of interviews, combined with the considerable overlap between positions, underscores the centrality of this tension between profit-making and best practice.

4.4 Internal Contradictions

Four farmers who espoused the importance of being a market actor as part of being a 'good farmer' also expressed concerns around this same trajectory. For example, P6, a dairy farmer who advocated for the removal of government support from agriculture – *"let everyone see the price of food"* – saw the decline of non-profitable farms as *"really sad"* but also *"a natural part of how a lot of businesses go"*. He named *"mismanagement from government level right back to farm level and lack of entrepreneurial flair"* as responsible for the closure of farm businesses. However, he also expressed concern over the loss of these farmers:

"It's not magic, but farmers have been starved effectively. Now, within that there are good farmers and bad farmers. We know all that. But there are some very good farmers who, through no fault of their own, have been starved out of the food chain, literally and have gone."

As well as this, P6 also voiced unease over the direction that agriculture is heading saying that he is "*very uncomfortable*" about the future of the industry, which he saw as heading towards "*corporatisation*". Despite referencing significant positive engagement with actors who fall into this "*corporatisation of ag and food*" camp (noting how he has done courses with or sponsored by Tesco, Gal-tech and Goldman Sachs), P6 also held significant concerns about their influence. He saw the leaders of the transition towards more corporate agriculture as:

"*Well organised and well financed corporations who've worked off skinny margins but big numbers and they are prepared to do that. With chief executives who have got salary-driven expectations and pensions – and multimillion-pound pensions – they need to fund."*

Overall, he attempts to face the future with a positive mindset:

"I think there's no point in trying to moan about it. I'm not in that camp…If you've got any sort of work ethic, a more global mindset, you are really passionate about what you do and you genuinely love the whole food environment piece then there's some amazing opportunities. I talk about that when I go to Young Farmers. I try and excite them, even though [P6 name] is quietly a little bit, you know, he could become a little bit worried,

disturbed about where we are heading, you can only embrace it because you're not going to stop it. Why not embrace what's coming?"

The 'taste of necessity' can be seen at work here; "*you can only embrace it because you're not going to stop it*". As the overall nature of the agricultural landscape has shifted to become more market oriented, P6 has accepted and values market-related skills because they are necessary. However, concerns remain. His habitus has adjusted to value what is economically necessary, but tensions and unease remain.

4. 5 Perspectives on the Role of Government

Discussions regarding ongoing changes to agricultural policy proved to be fertile ground for examining how increasingly market-oriented 'good farmer' identities operate. The 'good farmer' literature has identified the importance of autonomy in relation to farming activity, and the dislike of policy that is seen as overly controlling (Burton et al., 2008; Morris and Reed, 2007; Riley, 2016). This was a particularly pertinent narrative found among participants in this study, with over a third of farmers expressing a dislike for policy schemes that limited their autonomy. This dislike was also reflected in frustrations about assurance schemes, cooperative requirements, and/or private standards, which were described as difficult to implement in just under a quarter of interviews.

What is particularly interesting is that farmers were more vocal regarding limits to their autonomy when it came through the form of government policy, rather than through supply-chain related schemes or requirements, highlighting deeper acceptance of and alignment with more pro-market stances within farmers' habitus. Presumably, engagement in supply chains is seen as vital to farm business survival; the associated demands are therefore more readily accepted, albeit begrudgingly at times. Engagement in supply chains is also more oriented towards the farming ideal of food production, whereas recent policy changes focus on rewards for practices related to increased engagement in environmentally friendly land management. As policy-related income streams become less lucrative and/or farmers become less comfortable with accepting government influence over their farming practice, they show increased willingness to critique and/or disengage from policy prescriptions. Only three participants significantly planned their farming practice around agri-environmental scheme requirements, but over half of farmers engaged in these schemes if there was a "goodness of fit" (Riley, 2016: 8). Six claimed not to alter their practice in response to policy requirements. Within some discussions, a level of disdain or ideological discomfort regarding

the receipt of government money was expressed by seven respondents, with one describing the Basic Payment Scheme as a "*dole cheque*" (P22) and others commenting:

"[My wife] and I did a SWOT [strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats] analysis of our business, a few years ago. One of the things that we said was, we wanted to de-politicise our business. So, it meant just completely focusing on our customers, and selling our story, and hopefully, getting a fair price. Rather than rely on any kind of payment from the government, or the taxpayer." P23

"I've based my business on — by it looking after itself and not getting handouts from the government. That goes against the grain, for me." P9

"[sustainability] has got to be driven by the industry that buys the product…I don't think government legislation is of the slightest bit of interest to farmers. I mean, we're not talking about just a handout, that's not going to save farming. Farming will be saved because there's an appreciation by the bulk-buyer of the commodity that he has got to tell his consumer that the [product] is very sustainable." P36

Ten participants were pleased to see the reduction of subsidies, feeling that this change would reduce the number of 'bad' farmers who were unable to sustain commercially viable businesses through food production:

"it [subsidies] also has kept the wrong farmers farming, in my view. It has supported people who haven't made a good business." P23

"Farming shouldn't need to have subsidies over the years…We've never farmed for subsidies…Whereas some of these places, if they are going to lose a subsidy, they are going to go under. Because all they've done is wait for that brown envelope to come through each year." P27

If the field is understood as a 'site of struggle' where individuals vie for a higher position within the social hierarchy, these perspectives can be read as farmers seeing policy change as a tool for removing both their potential competition and those who are unable to adapt to the changing landscape, making them 'bad' farmers.

5. Concluding Discussion

This research has found that the ability to be business-minded, specifically the ability to respond quickly to volatile market signals and demands, is becoming increasingly valued as a

form of embodied managerial cultural capital among farmers. Whilst there are differing perspectives on what should be valued within the 'good farmer' rubric, to be a 'good farmer' requires, above all, farming. If economic survival requires increased market orientation, then through the 'taste of necessity', this becomes culturally valued, albeit in different ways depending on how other 'good farmer' values are weighted within an individual's habitus. As field-level changes trigger a range of 'creative responses', the diversity of these valuations outlines increased fragmentation within the 'good farmer' identity as a response to the range of creative responses enacted (Sutherland and Darnhofer, 2012).

Opinions on the role of government in farming and in relation to recent agricultural policy changes varied, with many aligning with findings from previous 'good farmer' research. While many farmers engaged with agri-environmental schemes where there was 'goodness of fit,' there was resistance to policy perceived as constraining autonomy, alongside a substantial (but not universal) narrative that 'good farmers' should not depend on subsidies but instead survive through market competence. There is a greater level of incongruence found within this study than in other works. For example, Cusworth and Dudsworth's study found that, in a data set of 40 farmers, "the relationship the interviewed farmers had towards the provision of public goods was by and large positive" (p.934) and that, overall, interviewees expressed "pragmatism…towards changing subsidy arrangements" (p.935).

Cusworth and Dodsworth (2021) found that the 'public goods provider' has become integrated within a productivist type 'good farmer' identity. This evaluation may well be accurate to a proportion of this study's interviewees. However, for some, government support for the 'public goods provider' identity has pushed them further towards a more neoliberal perspective on the role of both government and the 'free market' in farming. This includes perspectives which align with Haggerty et al.'s definition of neoliberalism within an agricultural context, where environmental management is increasingly driven by market rather than government forces (2009: 768). For example, the view expressed by P36 above, that sustainability should be driven by the market and not a government "*handout*".

There was a significant narrative present across interviews that 'good farmers' are not dependent on public money due to their skilled ability to adapt to market conditions. Coulson and Milbourne have identified the tensions between government intervention in agriculture and "neoliberal aspirations to release the economy from the constraints of regulation" (2022: 130). Uncovered here is an example of how farmers mediate this tension within their own

habitus, with some viewing government intervention as a restraint on the 'invisible hand' of the free market, internalising a stigmatised perspective on government payments. Reductions in government support increase the likelihood that market-oriented actors succeed, and thus the cultural value of market-oriented practice increases as it becomes a 'necessary' skill, not just to succeed in the 'game' but even to access the playing field. For some, subsidy withdrawal was welcomed as a mechanism of field purification, removing 'bad' farmers and rewarding adaptable market actors. In this light, economic independence becomes a symbolic virtue, reflecting the moralisation of market survival; even when food production could arguably be considered a public good, and thus worthy of subsidisation (Timmerman, 2018). For farmers who have already internalised the value of being a responsive market actor, this shift in the 'rules of the game' at the field level favours them. 'Good farmers' adapt and survive (Shortall et al., 2018: 595; Sutherland et al., 2012), and, from the perspective of some, if others have not been able or willing to adapt in response to growing market influence over agriculture, then the closure of their businesses is acceptable.

Here, the precise definition of productivism becomes particularly salient, as this pro-market farmer rejects a core part (but often overlooked in 'good farmer' literature, with the exception of Burton, 2004a) of Lowe et al.'s definition of productivism: "a commitment to an intensive, industrially driven and expansionist agriculture *with state support* based primarily on output and increased productivity" (1993: 221, emphasis added). In addition to this, supply chain actors are increasingly influencing farmer practice (and what 'good farming' entails) through assurance schemes and private standards (Burch et al., 2012; Burch and Lawrence, 2007; Konefal et al., 2005). These schemes and standards facilitate multifunctional models of agriculture (Wilson, 2008). In this manner, the "intensive" and "based primarily on output" aspects of productivism are also in flux, leaving surprisingly little of the original definition intact.

Market responsiveness becomes a differentiating mechanism within the symbolic hierarchy, although, as noted, there is fragmentation present. Not everyone interviewed valued this skill equally, if at all, and tensions remained around the role of luck and the moral limits of 'too much' focus on profit. Whilst further research would be required for bolder conclusions to be drawn, it appears that dairy and horticultural farmers value the skill of market responsiveness more than other farm types. The two farmers who saw price as 'luck' illustrated this with examples of selling livestock to market. Both horticultural and dairy produce is subject to spoilage and usually sold into retail-oriented supply chains, either directly to a retailer or

through a producer group. For livestock farmers, sales are often tied to specific physical markets or sale events, but greater flexibility in timing makes market responsiveness less necessary.

It is theorised here that the type of product, the way it is sold, and who it is sold to, are influential in the valuation of this skill. Field-level changes mean that farmers must adapt depending on their farm type, product sold, and route to market. Fragmentation in the 'good farmer' identity is likely to occur along these lines, with varying levels and forms of influence from non-farm actors. These hypotheses provide fertile ground for further research. What stands out in this dataset, beyond the patterns observed in horticultural and dairy farms, is the lack of a clear relationship between participant characteristics and the valuation of market-oriented skills (with 20 participants framing this as required for success), particularly market responsiveness (noted by 17 participants). Whilst further research with a larger and/or more representative dataset would be required to draw generalisable conclusions, this suggests that the importance of being 'market-minded' as a marker of a 'good farmer' may represent a relatively consistent trend.

However, this trend is not without tension even within individuals, evidence of what Shortall et al. have described as the "divided self" (2018: 585; see also Vigors et al., 2023). The example of P6 shows how changes in skill valuation are viewed as necessary but retain an element of loss as previous symbols of 'good farming' (and 'good farmers' themselves) are devalued. Rather than an enthusiastic commitment to neoliberal subjectivity, this reconfiguration of the 'good farmer' ideal suggests pragmatic adjustment to structural, field-level pressures. This is a case of the 'taste of necessity' at work and aligns with Sutherland and Darnhofer's argument that economic duress can 'tighten' the link between economic and cultural capital (2012: 235). Whether this 'divided self' will fade as farmers' habituses continue to adjust remains to be seen, highlighting the importance of temporally sensitive research in relation to the 'good farmer' (Riley, 2016).

Both the 'good farmer' concept and Bourdieu's social theory have been successful because of their attempts to move beyond limited, profit-oriented, understandings of individual (or farmer) motivations. Yet, somewhat ironically, within this study their use reveals the enduring dominance of financial viability regarding how farming identities are judged. However, key here is that increased valuation of economic rationale exists *because of* non-economic reasoning, rather than a simplistic (re)enactment of 'homo economicus'. The focus

on economic rationale within farming may not solely reflect the longstanding impact of productivism, but rather the 'taste of necessity' at work in a context where farming (let alone 'good farming') is increasingly difficult on a commercial viability level. Crucially, for many, the non-economic significance of farming is what drives the need for increased focus on economic success, as one farmer articulated:

"*If you can't make it work financially, you can't farm, full stop…It's not just a job to us. It's part of us. That's what we are."* P25

References

AHDB (Agriculture and Horticulture Development Board) (2022) High prices but high fertiliser cost, https://ahdb.org.uk/news/high-prices-but-high-fertiliser-cost-grain-market-daily Accessed 8/12/25

Barlow, H., Lostak, M. (2023) Retailer and grower relationships and the supply chain pressures in English horticulture: The lived experience, *Journal of Rural Studies* (102:11)

Bourdieu, P. (1977) *Outline of a Theory of Practice* (Chicago University Press)

Bourdieu, P. (1984) *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste* (Harvard University Press)

Bourdieu, P. (1986) The forms of capital, in, Richardson, J. (ed.) *Handbook of Theory and Research for the Sociology of Education* (Greenwood Press)

Bourdieu, P. (1989) Social Space and Symbolic Power, *Sociological Theory* (7:1)

Bourdieu, P. (1990) *The Logic of Practice* (Polity Press)

Bourdieu, P. (1994) *In Other Words: Essays Towards A reflexive Sociology*, Adamson, M. (trans.) (Polity Press)

Bourdieu, P. (1998) *Practical Reason: On the Theory of Action* (Stanford University Press)

Bourdieu, P., Wacquant, L. (1992) *An Invitation to Reflexive Sociology* (University of Chicago Press)

Brown, C., Kovács, E., Herzon, I., Villamayor-Tomas, S., Albizua, A., Galanaki, A., Grammatikopoulou, I., McCracken, D., Alkan Olsson, J., Zinnegrebe, Y. (2011) Simplistic understandings of farmer motivations could undermine the environmental potential of the common agricultural policy, *Land Use Policy* (101)

Burch, D., Dixon, J., Lawrence, G. (2012) Introduction to symposium on the changing role of supermarkets in global supply chains: from seedling to supermarket: agri-food supply chains in transition, *Agriculture and Human Values* (30)

Burch, D., Lawrence, G. (2007) *Supermarkets and Agri-Food Supply Chains: Transformations in the production and consumption of foods* (Edward Elgar)

Burton, R J F. (2004a) Seeing through the ‘good farmer’s’ eyes: towards developing an understanding of the social symbolic value of ‘productivist’ behaviour, *Sociologia Ruralis* (44)

Burton, R J F. (2004b) Reconceptualising the ‘behavioural approach’ in agriculture studies: a socio-psychological perspective, *Journal of Rural Studies* (20:3)

Burton, R J F., Forney, J., Stock, P., Sutherland, L-A. (2021) *The Good Farmer: Culture and Identity in Food and Agriculture* (Routledge, Earthscan)

Burton, R J F., Kuczera, C., Schwarz, G. (2008) Exploring farmers’ cultural resistance to voluntary agri-environmental schemes, *Sociologia Ruralis* (48)

Burton, R J F., Paragahawewa, U H. (2011) Creating culturally sustainable agri-environmental schemes, *Journal of Rural Studies* (27)

Busch, L. (2011) The private governance of food: equitable exchange or bizarre bazaar?, *Agriculture and Human Values* (28)

Campbell, H. (2013) Food and the audit society, in, Murcott, A., Belasco, W., Jackson, P. (eds.) *The Handbook of Food Research* (Bloomsbury Publishing)

Chun Tie, Y., Birks, M., Francis, K. (2019) Grounded theory research: A design framework for novice researchers, *SAGE Open Medicine* (7)

Cloke, P. (1997) Country backwater to virtual village? Rural studies and ‘the cultural turn’, *Journal of Rural Studies* (13:4)

Coulson, H., Milbourne, P. (2022) Agriculture, food and land: Struggles for UK post-Brexit agri-food justice, *Geoforum* (131)

Cusworth G., Dodsworth, J. (2021) Using the ‘good farmer’ concept to explore agricultural attitudes to the provision of public goods. A case study of participants in an English agri-environmental scheme, *Agriculture and Human Values* (38)

DEFRA (Department of Environment, Agriculture and Rural Affairs) (2020) 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/954283/agricultural-transition-plan.pdf Accessed 20/12/25

Dobbs, T L., Pretty, J. (2008) Case study of agri-environmental payments: The United Kingdom, *Ecological Economics* (65)

Enticott, G., Gates, M C., Hidano, A. (2021) "It's just the luck of the draw": Luck, good farming and the management of animal disease in Aotearoa, New Zealand, *Geoforum* (119)

Fairweather, J R., Keating, N C. (1994) Goals and management of New Zealand farmers, *Agricultural Systems* (44:2)

Food Foundation, The (2025) *Corporate lobbying: the dark side of the plate*, https://foodfoundation.org.uk/publication/corporate-lobbying-dark-side-plate Accessed 8/12/25

Gilbert, G. (2001) *Researching Social Life* (Sage)

Glaser, B G., Strauss, A L. (1967) *The Discovery of Grounded Theory* (Aldine)

Haggerty, J., Campbell, H., Morris, C. (2009) Keeping the stress off the sheep? Agricultural intensification, neoliberalism, and 'good' farming in New Zealand, *Geoforum* (40:5)

Harrison, C M., Burgess, J., Clark, J. (1998) Discounted knowledges: Farmers' and residents' understandings of nature conservation goals and policies, *Journal of Environmental Management* (54:4)

Harvey, D. (2007) *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* (Oxford University Press)

Hill, B., Bradley, D. (2024) Goals and values of farmers revisited: Gasson fifty years on, *Journal of Agricultural Economics* (75:1)

Holloway, L. (2005) Aesthetics, genetics, and evaluating animal bodies: Locating and displacing cattle on show and in figures, *Environment and Planning D* (23)

Hunt, L. (2010) Interpreting orchardists' talk about their orchards: the good orchardists, *Agriculture and Human Values* (27)

Jack, L., Hammans, H. (2022) Unpicking Food Prices: Where does your food pound go, and why do farmers get so little? *Sustain* https://www.sustainweb.org/news/nov22-unpicking-food-prices-new/ Accessed 5/12/24

Jenkins, R. (2024) *Pierre Bourdieu* (Taylor and Francis)

Kam, H., Smith, H., Potter, C. (2023) Public money for public goods: the role of ideas in driving agriculture policy in the EU and post-Brexit UK, *Land Use Policy* (129)

Konefal, J., Mascarenhas, M., Hatanaka, M. (2005) Governance in the global agro-food system: Backlighting the role of transnational supermarket chains, *Agriculture and Human Values* (22)

Leitschuh, B., Stewart, W P., van Riper, C J. (2022) Place-making in the Corn Belt: The productivist landscapes of the "good farmer", *Journal of Rural Studies* (92)

Lowe, P., Murdoch, J., Marsden, T., Munton, R., Flynn, A. (1993) Regulating the New Rural Spaces: The Uneven Development of Land, *Journal of Rural Studies* (9:3)

Maton, K. (2008) Habitus, in, Grenfell, M. (ed.) *Pierre Bourdieu: Key Concepts* (Taylor and Francis)

McGuire, J M., Morton, L W., Arbuckle, J G., Cast, A D. (2015) Farmer identities and responses to the social-biophysical environment, *Journal of Rural Studies* (39)

Miller-Klugesherz, J A., Sanderson., M R. (2023) Good for the soil, but good for the farmer? Addiction and recovery in transitions to regenerative agriculture, *Journal of Rural Studies* (103)

Morris, C., Evans, N. (1999) Research on the geography of agricultural change: redundant or revitalised? *Area* (13:4)

Morris, C., Reed, M. (2007) From burgers to diversity? The McDonaldization of on-farm nature conservation in the UK, *Agriculture and Human Values* (24)

Naylor, R., Hamilton-Webb, R., Little, R., Maye, D. (2016) The "good farmer": farmer identities and the control of exotic livestock disease in England, *Sociologia Ruralis* (58:1)

Nogger's Blog (n.d.) https://www.noggersblog.co.uk/ Accessed 20/3/26

Phillips, E., Gray, I. (1995) Farming 'practice' as temporally and spatially situated intersections of biography, culture and social structure, *The Australian Geographer* (26:2)

Putnam, R D. (2001) *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community* (Simon and Schuster)

Riley, M. (2016) How does longer term participation in agri-environment schemes [re]shape farmers' environmental dispositions and identities? *Land Use Policy* (52)

Riley, M., Harvey, D. (2005) Landscape archaeology, Heritage and the Community in Devon: An Oral History Approach, *International Journal of Heritage Studies* (11:4)

Riley, M., Robertson, B. (2022) The virtual good farmer: Farmers' use of social media and the (re)presentation of "good farming", *Sociologia Ruralis* (62:3)

Saugeres, L. (2002) The cultural representation of the farming landscape: masculinity, power and nature, *Journal of Rural Studies* (18:4)

Saunders, F P. (2016) Complex Shades of Green: Gradually Changing Notions of the 'Good Farmer' in a Swedish Context, *Sociologia Ruralis* (56:3)

Sebastian, K. (2019) Distinguishing between the strains of grounded theory: classical, interpretive and constructivist, *Journal for Social Thought* (3)

Seth, A. Randall, G. (2020) *The Grocers: The rise and rise of the supermarket chains* (Kogan Page)

Shortall, O., Sutherland, L-A., Ruston, A., Kaler, J. (2018) True Cowmen and Commercial Farmers: Exploring Vets' and Dairy Farmers' Contrasting Views of 'Good Farming' in Relation to Biosecurity, *Sociologia Ruralis* (58:3)

Silvasti, T. (2003) The cultural model of the "good farmer" and the environmental question in Finland, *Agriculture and Human Values* (20:2)

Stock, P V. (2007) 'Good farmers' as reflexive producers: an examination of family organic producers in the US Midwest, *Sociologia Ruralis* (47)

Sutherland, L-A. (2010) Environmental grants and regulations in strategic farm business decision-making: A case study of attitude behaviour in Scotland, *Land Use Policy* (27)

Sutherland, L-A. (2013) Can organic farmers be 'good farmers'? Adding the 'taste of necessity' to the conventionalization debate, *Agriculture and Human Values* (30)

Sutherland, L-A. (2019) Finding 'Hobby' Farmers: A 'Parish Study' in Methodology for Qualitative Research, *Sociologia Ruralis* (60:1)

Sutherland, L-A., Bâtie, C., Gröndal, H., Rousset, N. (2024) Of poultry and the good farmer: Skilled role performance in antimicrobial use on poultry farms in Sweden, France and Vietnam, *Sociologia Ruralis* (64:4)

Sutherland, L-A., Burton, R J F. (2011) Good farmers, good neighbours? The role of cultural capital in social capital development in a Scottish farming community, *Sociologia Ruralis* (51:3)

Sutherland, L-A., Burton, R J F., Ingram, J., Blackstock, K., Slee. B., Gotts, N. (2012) Triggering change: towards a conceptualisation of major change processes in farm decision-making, *Journal of Environmental Management* (104)

Sutherland, L-A., Darnhofer, I. (2012) Of organic farmers and 'good farmers': Changing habitus in rural England, *Journal of Rural Studies* (28)

Taverner, C. (2025) Paying the Price: Cheap food, big business and the cost to farming and food security, *Food, Farming and Countryside Commission*, https://ffcc-uk.files.svdcdn.com/production/assets/downloads/FFCC_False-Economy_report_part2_v5-1.pdf?dm=1741863510 Accessed 20/12/25

Thomson, P. (2008) Field, in, Grenfell, M. (ed.) *Pierre Bourdieu: Key Concepts* (Taylor and Francis)

Timmerman, C. (2018) Food security as a global public good, in, Vivero-Pol, J., Ferrando, T., De Schutter, O., Mattei, U. (eds.) *Routledge Handbook of Food as a Commons* (Routledge)

Topp, E., Stephan, A., Varela, E., Cicek, H., Plieninger, T. (2024) Mediterranean farmers' understandings of 'good soil management' and 'good farmer' identity in the context of conservation agriculture, *International Journal of Agricultural Sustainability* (22:1)

Vigors, B., Wemelsfelder, F., Lawrence, A B. (2023) What symbolises a "good farmer" when it comes to farm animal welfare? *Journal of Rural Studies* (98)

Wilson, G. (2008) From 'weak' to 'strong' multifunctionality: conceptualising farm-level multifunctional transition pathways, *Journal of Rural Studies* (23)

Winter, M. (2000) Strong policy or weak policy? The environmental impact of the 1992 reforms to the CAP arable regime in Great Britain, *Journal of Rural Studies* (16)

Yang, Y. (2014) Bourdieu, Practice and Change: Beyond the criticism of determinism, *Education Philosophy and Theory* (46:14)

Yarwood, R., Evans, N. (1999) The Changing Geography of Rare Livestock Breeds in Britain, *Geography* (84:1)

Chapter 8: Conclusion

1. Introduction

In the first paper of this thesis – presented in Chapter 4 – I briefly mentioned the annual cider making which took place (and still does) in my childhood village. To give you a brief insight into this process: apples collected over the preceding days are put through a 'scratter' which is powered by Jim's steam engine, producing a stream of apple mush (see Picture 1). We used an old-fashioned pressing machine – I don't know how more modern apple pressing works, but ours was a bit like a massive flower press. Net fabric is laid out, filled with the apple mush, and then wrapped into what is known as "cheeses" – large squares of fabric wrapped apple mush. They are then layered and pressed (see Picture 2). The juice is then caught by a series of rustled-up containers – formal and professional demijohns and washed-out milk cartons. It becomes cider over time, fermenting in these bottles and eventually turns to vinegar. At the vinegar stage, my Dad would insist it was absolutely still at the cider stage and his friends' mouths would pucker up like cat's bottoms as they tried to drink the stuff. I actually don't like cider very much, but nothing in life will ever taste like a swig of apple juice straight from a plastic milk bottle after a day of pressing.

Picture 1 (above); Picture 2 (left)
Photographs courtesy of Hazel Blenkinsop

The fabric used wasn't specially produced for this purpose – my Mum had pilfered all the local charity shops for their stashes of net curtains, and we used those. We would wash and store them at home after the pressing day and one year, a pair of my brother's underpants were accidentally washed with the net curtains. Everything was then folded and put away. The following year, no one noticed this mistake until after a set of cheeses was completed and the press was lifted back up to reveal that a pair of my brother's underpants had been washed and put away with the curtains. That particular batch contained a particular unique flavour which I think hipster breweries would be proud of – pants.

The pressing has moved from a (probably post-cider consumption) idea between my Dad and his friend and more into the hands of the village hall committee as it has become a more established, well-known event. Now, the apples are prepared before they enter the scratter to ensure all slightly mouldy sections are cut away and the scratter does not break. When I was a child, we just dunked them in cold water and threw them into the scratter whole. I think this whole thing is a good metaphor for research – a community endeavour where various sources of information (literature, interview data, etc.) are churned together into various narrative containers. If we think of the preceding papers as 'cheeses' layered on top of each other, this conclusion considers how they all come together in one liquid form (Section 3). Research evolves as we learn and become more established in conceptual village hall committees. Thus, the limitations of this project are addressed here too (Section 2), although I maintain that there are none as significant as a pair of my brother's pants.

2. Thesis Limitations

As I addressed in more detail in Chapter 3, there are some limitations to this research which are produced by the sample itself. To summarise, I do accept that my sample make-up has limited my ability to really draw out sector-specific nuances. This is especially prevalent regarding farm type, given that some farm types are represented only superficially (such as stand-alone egg production) and others are unrepresented (stand-alone broiler poultry and pork production). Alternatively, this sample could have been more refined through a focus on one specific area within England, but this could have resulted in something too narrow for the original research questions. I don't feel that these issues are enough to exclude the whole apple of the sample, but its imperfections are acknowledged. Engagement with other stakeholders, such as policy and/or retailer actors would also have been beneficial. However, the aim of this research was an in-depth focus on farmer perspectives and practicalities would

have made engaging these other stakeholders difficult. The goal was apple cider, not a blend of fruits!

The grounded theory approach used in this thesis also produces limitations. For example, as I note in Chapter 6, I did not directly ask each interviewee if they expanded and how. Similarly, whilst the phrase 'good farmer' was used by many interviewees, I did not directly ask each interviewee what they feel makes a 'good farmer'. This is an unavoidable part of grounded theory; we don't know what we are about to find out. I feel the justification for the use of grounded theory within this thesis is strong, but I accept the limitations that such an approach produces.

3. Key Findings, Implications for Further Research and Responses to Original Research Questions

3.1 Centrality and Importance of Care

Care has been a running theme in this thesis. In Chapter 4, I presented the centrality of care within research practices and, in Chapter 2, I outlined the specific implications this had for this research project. Chapter 4 contributed an original illustration of the role that emotions have within knowledge production. This can also be seen in Chapter 6, where I highlighted the importance of experiential knowledge generated through practice for 'good care' and thus 'good farming' (Harbers, 2010; Law 2010; Singleton 2010; Singleton and Law 2013; Krzywoszynska, 2016). Chapter 6 provides a response to my first research question – **what motivates and sustains farmers in their practice?** – by outlining the affective ties farmers have to their work, echoing the affective ties to my own work presented in Chapter 4.

Chapter 6 teases out the complex reality this affective connection creates within agricultural contexts. The reality of multiple cares is that they are often in conflict – Chapter 6 saw discussions of the tensions created when farmers must navigate how to enact care towards the farm inhabitants, the farm as a business, their identity as farmers, and their own wellbeing. The "chronically problematic" (Law, 2010: 69) nature of multiple cares is intensified under increasingly difficult economic conditions where acts of care work to both uphold and resist the wider agri-food system (Rutt and Møller, 2025). Financially motivated decisions to diversify, for example, were experienced as positive by some farmers, improving their working lives and reducing stress related to agricultural productivity (or lack of it). However, the decision to expand and/or diversify was not a positive experience for most interviewees and represents a reality where farmers must adapt to economic contexts in ways that

compromise how they express care towards themselves and/or the farm inhabitants. Leaving farming may represent an act of 'self-care' when a farmer refuses to continue absorbing stress and financial hardship. However, doing so furthers the reality of larger, few farms which themselves have implications for how care is practiced and in what form. Leaving farming also represents a significant loss for individuals who are deeply attached to their farms (Wheeler et al., 2018) and can be read as a loss of experiential knowledge. Experiential knowledge is something which contains an emotional, affective component. Through this affective engagement, responsibility can thus be generated (Singleton, 2012).

These findings are relevant to those seeking to understand and support farmer mental health and wellbeing (Garner et al., 2025). They demonstrate that farming involves significant emotional labour, requiring the continual balancing of care for the self with care for others, and that experiences of stress and burnout are often structurally produced rather than purely individual. By connecting practices of care to the practical realities of farm expansion and diversification, this research highlights how farmer wellbeing is shaped not only by individual circumstances, but also by market and governance structures, which therefore share responsibility for these outcomes. This is in line with the ethos of care ethics, where care is seen as a *collective* responsibility (Tronto, 2017).

Care in the context of farm business change (expansion and diversification) is an original framing, and one that explores the topic of distance within care – something wider agri-care ethics literature has noted requires scrutiny (Bartos, 2019; Tronto, 1993; Smith, 1998; Cusworth, 2023). This emerges as an analysis which responds to the research question "**How are farmers responding to changing contexts?**" Through this analysis, I found that these changes risk eroding the conditions required for 'good care' to flourish. The capacity required to be attentive and to generate and maintain experiential knowledge are impacted by these changes. Distance also risks being created between those who 'care for' and those who make decisions about farming practice, even if they 'care about' the farm. Larger farms are not 'uncaring', but the way care is practiced is renegotiated towards more abstract, distant forms. The complex, often contradictory, nature of care has been explored within wider agri-care literature (Mincyte et al., 2025; Rutt and Møller, 2025; Martin et al., 2015; Fry et al., 2022; Holloway et al., 2022; Overstreet, 2018; Singleton, 2010; Enticott and O'Mahony, 2024). This paper contributes to this body of literature and makes an original contribution through its heightened consideration of the farmers' own wellbeing within the web of care (Wheeler et al., 2025).

These findings highlight how agricultural policy risks being ineffective, if not harmful, if it fails to recognise the value of care as a central component of farming practice, including the emotional and experiential dimensions that underpin decision-making on farms. On an expenditure level, reducing/removing direct payments makes 'sense' – one sixth of the current EU budget goes towards direct payments to farmers (European Parliament, 2025). However, post-Brexit agricultural policy has been criticised for 'opening up' UK agriculture to the free market, which inadequately values food as a commodity (Taverner, 2025; Timmerman, 2018; Holt Giménez, 2017), impacting the economic viability of farms, making farm business expansion (or 'absorption' into larger farms) and/or diversification an increasingly likely option (Hubbard, 2019; Lingham et al., 2025)[10]. Within this, farming risks being reshaped in ways that distances care practices from direct, embodied engagement. As farm businesses expand, care practices become increasingly distanced from direct, embodied engagement, raising questions about how effectively responsibility can be maintained within larger and more corporatised systems.

3.2 Economic Pressures

Economic factors were stressed by interviewees as a significant challenge to and influence on their practice, providing a rich answer to my research question "**What challenges do farmers feel are particularly pertinent for them at this time?**" My commitment to centring the lived experiences of farming within this work thus led me to explore these economic contexts further. The impact of these challenges and the resultant decisions to expand and/or diversify are summarised above. In response to interview data, Chapter 5 explored the influence of supermarkets on farm practice, specifically through the contexts of price-setting power, the imbalance of cost-sharing in relation to increased private standards, and the lack of consideration given to farmer knowledge when it comes to drafting these standards. This undervaluing of farmer knowledge speaks to the importance of experiential knowledge discussed in Chapter 6, where the experiential knowledge held by farmers through sustained, embodied engagement with their farms over time produces unique, contextual understandings (Krzywoszynska, 2016).

The multiple demands which farmers must face – both productivist and post-productivist in nature – was also explored within Chapter 5. The omission of corporate influence in debates

[10] This thesis focuses on ELMS specific policy. The potential for various productivity and/or diversification grants (Farming Equipment and Technology Fund, Farming Investment Fund, Adding Value grant etc.) to also contribute to the (re)negotiation of care is not discussed here for this reason.

on productivism and post-productivism indicates a need for greater attention to this issue – especially in agrarian research which often concentrates primarily on policy. Studies on Cattle Tracing System legislation have argued that embodied care practices on farms are vulnerable to displacement and/or 'colonisation' under regulatory policy (Singleton, 2010: 246; Singleton and Law, 2013). Given the way interviewees felt diversification, off-farm income and/or previous subsidy arrangements under the CAP 'subsidised' supermarkets and that the costs of scheme adherence fell unevenly on farmers, as discussed in Chapter 5, whether (and if so, how) private governance replicates this 'colonisation' dynamic is worthy of exploring within future research.

Productivism was also discussed in Chapter 7, and the value of focusing on precise definitions is noted (which I learned through my engagement with the post-productivism literature seen in Chapters 2 and 5). Literature on the good farmer identity often uses the phrase 'productivism'. However, from my reading, only Burton (2004) really addresses the actual definition of productivism, using the common definition given by Lowe et al. (1992): "a commitment to an intensive, industrially driven and expansionist agriculture with state support based primarily on output and increased productivity". The fact that farmers must respond to "hybrid demands" (Beacham et al., 2023), as discussed in Chapter 5, and now in the context of ELMS which aims to create farm businesses that are "profitable and economically sustainable without subsidy" (DEFRA, 2020: 7), prompts questions as to how productivism is understood within literature. Besides Burton's work (2004), literature often omits an explicit definition of the term, producing analysis that perhaps aligns with the 'spirit' of productivism but neglacts to engage with the role of the state present in Lowe et al.'s definition. For example, McGuire et al. (2015) cite Burton's (2004) work, but they conceive of a 'productivist' farming identity only in relation to literal practice:

"*The Productivist farmer relies heavily on one or two crop rotations, heavy applications of synthetic fertilizers, pesticides, genetically engineered seed and high-tech farm machinery…In short, the Productivist's primary goals are short-term profits and maximizing the output of the land resource in order to achieve high yields.*"

This misses the detail of where the state sits within this 'productivist' identity. It should be noted that McGuire and colleagues are writing in the context of a US case study, which also raises questions about how the definition of 'productivism' differs dependent on location and contextual history regarding the role of the state within agricultural production.

Also citing Burton (2004), Cusworth and Dodsworth refer to productivism in the contexts of efficiency, scale, intensification, and specialisation (2021: 938, 931). They produce useful analysis on how the 'public goods identity' integrates with farmer identities and with the productivist identity 'making room' for engagement with government agri-environmental schemes. They also engage with the minority perspective in their study that unsatisfactory levels of financial payment and concerns regarding autonomy and increased surveillance may result in disengagement with government schemes following direct payment removal (2021: 935). However, engagement with government/the role of the state is not explicitly connected to the productivist identity within this text. The salience of Burton's original query regarding productivism comes to the fore here:

"*The question is whether this is a cultural manifestation of 'productivism', i.e. "A commitment to an intensive, industrially driven and expansionist agriculture with state support based primarily on output and increased productivity" (Lowe et al. 1993, p. 221) or simply an inherent feature of commercial agriculture?*" (Burton, 2004: 197).

Some literature has touched on this issue, such as Saunders, who cautions:

"*we should be wary of conceiving the 'good farmer' too strictly in productivist terms, given that the 'rules of the agricultural game' in Sweden are leading to a more divergent farmer habitus.*" (2016: 391)

To align and add to Saunders' work, I argue that scholarship would benefit from increased awareness regarding the "with state support" aspect of productivism's definition[11]. This would allow for greater disaggregation between the 'letter' of productivism (sticking tightly to Lowe et al.'s definition) and its 'spirit' (its long-lasting cultural resonance). Greater clarification and engagement with the precise definition of the term would ensure two things: firstly, that behaviour is not superficially read as 'productivist' when it is actually a response to economic contexts (or perhaps an amalgamation of the two, which is still an important

[11] There is a discussion to be had as to if the term should be used at all in contemporary analysis, with Burton and Wilson (2012) outlining various forms of 'neoproductivism' (see also Evans et al., 2002; Evans, 2013; Wilson and Burton, 2015). However, neither the term 'neoproductivism' nor the various subtypes presented in Burton and Wilson's chapter have been firmly established within the literature. Notions of hybridity have been more readily picked up on, where the co-existence of various logics is foregrounded rather than the creation of 'new' descriptors (Beacham et al., 2023; Cusworth and Dodsworth, 2021; Riley, 2016: 73). This thesis has stayed close to the terms present within the bodies of literature that I am contributing to/in conversation with. 'good farmer' identity literature has not 'picked up' the neoproductivist classification, including within the 'textbook' on the topic co-authored by Burton (Burton et al., 2021). Only one text in the 'good farmer' area makes reference to neoproductivism (Wheeler et al., 2018).

distinction, without which the impact of the market is too easily skimmed over); secondly, that the changing role of the state – a key actor in agricultural history – is not missed within research.

The origins of productivism were state led, with the creation of the 'National Farm' marking a shift in how agriculture was governed in the UK (Murdoch and Ward, 1997). This emphasises my argument regarding the necessity of understanding the role of the state if we are to understand productivist practice. For farmers at this time, food production can also be understood through a framing of care: "feeding the national table" was positioned as a civic responsibility, enabling those not conscripted to 'do their bit' (Harvey and Riley, 2009: 513). Echoes of this framing are evident in Chapters 5 and 6, where some interviewees similarly describe food production as a form of responsibility. Recognising these origins complicates a straightforward reading of productivism as purely economically driven (Harvey and Riley, 2005). It highlights how care is embedded within historical contexts, rather than being an inherently virtuous practice which always yields 'ideal' results for all involved. This reinforces the need for greater precision in how productivism is defined and applied, ensuring that responses to economic conditions, state structures, and/or motivations driven by care-based commitments (which emerge entangled with historical narratives) are not collapsed into a single category defined solely by the type of farming practiced (e.g. 'industrial').

In this thesis, the case has been made that practice decisions, including in relation to expansion, are often financially motivated rather than out of loyalty to a productivist past. As we discussed in Chapter 5, the role of the state is important including in the consideration of increased private governance – the former holds democratic mandate whereas the latter does not. With neoliberal discourse competing for influence within agricultural policy (Frank et al., 2024; Tilzey, 2024), the role of government remains important to consider, given that neoliberalism is a *state-led* restructuring rather than the mere absence of state involvement (Harvey, 2007: 64-86). Within recent policy developments, this appears as food production moving solely within the domain of the market, with state-support for environmental measures 'picking up the slack' of market externalities, paying farmers for 'income foregone' based on *market* accounts, as discussed in Chapter 5 (Tilzey, 2000; Tilzey and Potter, 2007).

Within neoliberal agricultural governance – although, the current policy framework is not solely neoliberal, but rather a 'blend' of discourses, see Frank et al., 2024 – sustainability is only valuable when it can be measured (Bless et al., 2025). What is measured can thus be

translated into units of and for exchange (Marx, 1990: 229; Harvey, 2023: 30), and thus 'accounted for' within the market, aligning with the neoliberal preference for market solutions (Harvey, 2007: 11). Neoliberalism operates by "extending a specific formulation of economic values, practices, and metrics to every dimension of human life" (Brown, 2015: 30) – farmers must thus be framed as 'homo economicus' (economic man) rather than 'homines curans' (caring people) (Tronto, 2017). Joan Tronto has written on how this neoliberal understanding of human nature is flawed in its inability to account for and value the relational, interdependent reality of human (and all) life (2017).

The lived experiences of farmers, which such metrics are unable to measure, are not 'valid' within this framework and/or they require additional 'proof' (Bless et al., 2025). The everyday acts of care and the experiential knowledge – the acquisition of which often does not 'fit' well within drives towards economic efficiency, specialisation and/or digitalisation (Frank et al., 2024) – are not accounted for within this system, and therefore they are not valued. The lack of value given to these knowledges is not solely a feature of neoliberalism, but it is amplified within a neoliberal context due to its desire for 'society' and the subjects within it to be 'remade' into this market-driven framing (Tronto, 2017: 28-29). As I outlined in Chapter 6, these knowledges and embodied practice matter not just on an intrinsic basis, but also because they are capable of producing extrinsic value.

On a broader level outside of 'just' neoliberalism, there is wider literature on how care[12] and extra-economic labour is exploited, expropriated and eroded under capitalism (Fraser, 2022; Patel and Moore, 2017; Mies, 2014). It is precisely *because* such acts or, as Fraser terms them, extra-economic 'hidden abodes', are not valued within the market domain that they are able (and required) to be exploited – something must be 'free' (or, in Patel and Moore's conceptualisation, 'cheap') for surplus to be accrued (Marx, 1990a, 1990b). This thesis echoes this wider literature through its analysis of care as an aspect of farm life which is neglected within economic and governance spheres (Bless et al., 2025; Curry, 2002; Coulson and Milbourne, 2022; Brown et al., 2021) despite its importance for 'good farming' (Krzywoszynska, 2016).

The ways in which care is renegotiated as part of farm business changes, which are driven by financial realities, outlines its inability to be adequately valued within such an economic

[12] These texts often define 'care' in terms of the labour of social reproduction, rather than the broader care ethics definition by Fisher and Tronto (1990). However, they do cover the treatment of nature and food provision, making them of relevance to this context even if the vernacular differs slightly.

system – a market failure which is unaccounted for on policy levels. As discussed in Chapter 6, care does not disappear within larger farms, larger farm businesses and/or diversified farms – but it is renegotiated and the conditions needed for 'good' care risk erosion as part of this renegotiation. Even industrial agriculture contains practices of care, but these too are reshaped under changing economic and organisational conditions (Overstreet, 2018; Mincyte et al., 2025; Rutt and Møller, 2025).

This leads us on to the core findings of Chapter 7 which examined how the 'good farmer' identity is adjusting to current market contexts. This paper found that farmers are seeing the ability to survive volatile market conditions as being of growing importance, and that this is metabolised within their identities through the increased cultural valuation of the skill of market responsiveness. This, as Chapter 7 shows, has implications for how farmers evaluate themselves and each other, creating increased division and fragmentation within both the farming community as a whole and the 'good farmer' identity (Sutherland and Darnhofer, 2012). Chapter 7 found that, whilst not universal, a portion of farmers viewed policy change as a way for 'bad' farmers who cannot maintain a commercially viable farm without subsidy to be removed from the social field. Further research would need to be conducted to examine how the findings of Chapter 7 shift over time – as was done with, for example, Cusworth and Dodsworth (2021) and Riley's (2016) research. Whilst Chapter 6 gave a more practical answer to research question number three – **How are farmers responding to changing contexts?** – Chapter 7 provides an answer which focuses on the more cultural dimensions. Chapter 7 has shown that even 'economic' decisions and/or valuations hold broader cultural and social resonance. The ability to survive volatile market conditions isn't valued on a purely economic basis, but because it allows for a farmer to remain farming.

3.3 Challenges to Autonomy

A lot of the findings in this thesis can be broadly categorised under the theme of 'autonomy'. Farmers expressed uneven power dynamics in relation to supermarkets within the supply chain (Chapter 5) and, more broadly, fears regarding the 'corporatisation' of farming and how this can concentrate power within a small number of elites (Chapters 6 and 7). Chapter 6 noted the importance of autonomy in relation to a potential disconnect between those with decision-making power and those who enact the embodied reality of 'caring for' (and thus are exposed to contexts which generate responsibility).

These concerns go much further than "farmers don't like being told what to do". They highlight structural imbalances within the agri-food system. Chapter 5 detailed how farmers bear disproportionate economic risk within supply chains, while having limited influence over pricing and standards, raising questions about fairness and long-term sector resilience. This chapter also outlined the relative 'toothlessness' of current legislation over one of the key actors within these supply chains – food retailers. On a policy level, greater consideration is needed for how market actors shape practice and thus may limit the effectiveness of sustainability policies. The findings in Chapter 6 also raise concerns regarding decision-making power over agricultural practices, who holds the knowledge to make these decisions, and how localised, contextual knowledge risks being missed.

In Chapter 7, it was found that farmers were less reactive to challenges to their autonomy which came in the form of supply chain and supply chain adjacent direction, such as adherence to specific assurance schemes and standards. This was in contrast to how many farmers negatively discussed policy-related prescriptions, downplaying their influence on farm practice, as discussed in Chapter 5. As was argued in Chapters 5 and 7, this is theorised in relation to necessity; engagement with private standards and schemes is *de facto* mandatory for engagement in commercial supply chains (Busch and Bain, 2004; Campbell et al., 2012; Campbell, 2013; Fuchs et al., 2009). In contrast, although agri-environmental schemes are formally voluntary and may be experienced as economically necessary given the historic role of direct payments, they are nonetheless more open to negotiation or rejection than supply chain prescriptions (see Cusworth and Dodsworth, 2021: 935). Supply-chain related schemes function as more direct and unavoidable conditions of commercial participation. This is particularly so given the perceived significance of commercial success through food production within farming identities. Therefore, rejection of policy related prescriptions and/or only giving them minimal consideration when deciding farm practice, is easier.

In Chapter 6, I discussed the findings of Franklin et al.'s paper on environmental care under Nutrient Vulnerable Zone regulations, where farmers risked 'giving up' on feeling responsible for the environment if their actions felt considerably constrained by policy regulations (2021). This thesis has identified the potential for a similar sort of 'giving up' in relation to government policy. Whilst some interviewees did consider and respond to policy when considering farm practice, a significant number responded to policy changes by rejecting the 'public goods provider' identity and turning further towards the market for their

identity to be generated. Chapter 5 presented the surprisingly common perspective by interviewees that policy doesn't significantly impact their practice. Farm size played an important role here, according to interviewees, with smaller farms feeling "too small to matter" and government income being an "insignificant" portion of larger farm income. Farmers interviewed often framed policy payment as remuneration for practice they are already doing, rather than a driver of behavioural change. This was an unexpected result, given the statistical data on the level of farm business income made up from government sources. This result provides a thought-provoking response to research question four – **How, if at all, do these challenges differ from policy and governance narratives?**

As government funding becomes less readily available, less ideologically desirable (to some farmers: seven expressed ideological discomfort in this dataset), and/or economic viability through the market becomes more important, there is a chance that farmers may 'give up' on responding to government policy prescriptions. If the aim of agricultural policy is to ensure food security, effective mitigation and adaptation to climate change, and a 'food secure' population, there is the risk that 'grip' on the wheel is being lost to commodity traders and corporations. A similar theme is identified within Chapter 5, where corporations were seen to be enacting great, yet often overlooked, control over farm practice, drawing their mandate from their economic power rather than a social contract decided on a democratic basis. This points to a need for greater analytical attention to how authority and decision-making are negotiated between state and corporate actors in agriculture – an area that remains underdeveloped in existing literature. In particular, further work should examine how farmers' ideological orientations toward the state are formed, how these evolve over time, and how they shape engagement with policy, thereby situating policy uptake within a broader political-economic context rather than treating it as a purely technical or behavioural issue. These findings act as an 'early warning light' to policy-makers – current trajectories in agricultural governance may lead to declining policy engagement and reduced state influence over farming practices.

4. Conclusion

As with any thesis, there is a temptation to draft and re-draft in an attempt to produce a concoction which is perfect and will suit absolutely everyone's taste. However, if you leave apple juice in the container for too long, it turns to vinegar. If you are unlucky, as happened

in our house once, the pressure builds up so much that the whole glass demijohn explodes. Cider and research are, above all, intended to be shared.

In the preceding thesis, as I have just summarised, I have presented a series of papers which come together to form a drink which contains both novel findings, contributions to scholarship, and directions for further research. I aimed to create a transparent beverage, infused with honesty and meaning, as well as sense. The latter is important, if we are to look each other in the eye in line with good toasting etiquette. Cheers!

References

Bartos, A. (2019) Introduction: Stretching the Boundaries of Care, *Gender, Place and Culture* (26:6)

Beacham, J D., Jackson, P., Jaworski, C C., Krzywoszynska, A., Dicks, L V. (2023) Contextualising farmer perspectives on regenerative agriculture: A post-productivist future? *Journal of Rural Studies* (102)

Bless, A., Davila, F., Plant, R. (2025) Commodification and co-benefits: Neoliberalism and the growth of regenerative agriculture in Australia, *Journal of Rural Studies* (118)

Brown, C., Kovács, E., Herzon, I., Villamayor-Tomas, S., Albizua, A., Galanaki, A., Grammatikopoulou, I., McCracken, D., Alkan Olsson, J., Zinnegrebe, Y. (2011) Simplistic understandings of farmer motivations could undermine the environmental potential of the common agricultural policy, *Land Use Policy* (101)

Brown, W. (2015) *Undoing the Demos: Neoliberalism's Steal Revolution* (Zone Books)

Burton, R J F. (2004) Seeing through the 'good farmer's' eyes: towards developing an understanding of the social symbolic value of 'productivist' behaviour, *Sociologia Ruralis* (44)

Burton, R J F., Forney, J., Stock, P., Sutherland, L-A. (2021) *The Good Farmer: Culture and Identity in Food and Agriculture* (Routledge, Earthscan)

Burton, R J F., Wilson, G A. (2012) The Rejuvenation of Productivist Agriculture: The Case of 'Cooperative Neoproductivism', in, Almås, R., Campbell, H. (eds.) *Rethinking Agricultural Policy Regimes: Food Security, Climate Change, and the Future of Resilience of Global Agriculture* (Emerald Publishing Limited)

Busch, L., Bain, C. (2004) New! Improved? The Transformation of the Global Agrifood System, *Rural Sociology* (69:3)

Campbell, H. (2013) Food and the audit society, in, Murcott, A., Belasco, W., Jackson, P. (eds.) *The Handbook of Food Research* (Bloomsbury Publishing)

Campbell, H., Rosin, C., Hunt, L., Fairweather, J. (2012) The social practice of sustainable agriculture under audit discipline: Initial insights from the ARGOS project in New Zealand, *Journal of Rural Studies* (28:1)

Coulson, H., Milbourne, P. (2022) Agriculture, food and land: Struggles for UK post-Brexit agri-food justice, *Geoforum* (131)

Curry, J M. (2002) Care Theory and 'caring' systems of Agriculture, *Agriculture and Human Values* (19)

Cusworth G., Dodsworth, J. (2021) Using the 'good farmer' concept to explore agricultural attitudes to the provision of public goods. A case study of participants in an English agri-environmental scheme, *Agriculture and Human Values* (38)

Cusworth, G. (2023) Metabolic agricultural ethics: Violence and care beyond the gate, *Progress in Environmental Geography* (2:1-2)

DEFRA (Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs) (2020) 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/954283/agricultural-transition-plan.pdf Accessed 20/12/25

Enticott, G., O'Mahony, K. (2024) Feeding time(s): Patient urgence and the need for careful temporalities of antimicrobial resistance, *Environment and Planning E* (7:3)

European Parliament (2025) EU agricultural policy in numbers, https://www.europarl.europa.eu/topics/en/article/20211118STO17609/eu-agriculture-policy-in-numbers-infographics#what-amount-of-the-eu-budget-goes-to-farmers-7 Accessed 20/3/26

Evans N, Morris, C., Winter, M. (2002) Conceptualizing agriculture: A critique of post-productivism as the new orthodoxy, *Progress in Human Geography (*26)

Evans, N. (2013) Strawberry fields forever? Conflict over neo-productivist Spanish polytunnel technology in British agriculture. *Land Use Policy (*35)

Fisher, B., Tronto, J. (1990) Towards a Feminist Theory of Care, in, Abel, E., Nelson, M. (eds.) *Circles of Care* (State University of New York Press)

Frank, L., Feola, G., Schape, N. (2024) Assessing regime destabilisation through policy change: An analysis of agricultural policy in the United Kingdom during Brexit, *Environmental Innovation and Societal Transitions* (50)

Franklin, A., Udall, D., Schmutz, U., Rayns, F. (2021) 'Hell or high water': Good farming and environmental care as contested practices in the implementation of nitrate vulnerable zones in Wales, *Journal of Rural Studies* (83)

Fraser, N. (2022) *Cannibal Capitalism: How Our System is Devouring Democracy, Care, and the Planet – and what we can do about it* (Verso Books)

Fry, T., Marino, A., Nijhawan, S. (2022) Killing with Care: Locating ethical congruence in Multispecies, *ACME* (21:2)

Fuchs, D., Kalfagianni, A., Arentsen, M. (2009) Retail Power, Private Standards, and Sustainability in the Global Food System, in, Clapp, J., Fuchs, D. (eds.) *Corporate Power in Global Agrifood Governance* (MIT Press)

Garner, I., McFeeters, D., Guy, A., Hopley, R., Galbraith, N. (2025) Understanding farmer mental health and wellbeing in a volatile, isolating and misunderstood industry, *Journal of Rural Studies* (118)

Harbers, J A. (2010) Animal farm love stories: About care and economy, in, Mol, A., Moser, I., Pols, J. (eds.) *Care in practice: On tinkering in clinics, homes and farms* (Transcript)

Harvey, D. (2007) *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* (Oxford University Press)

Harvey, D. (2023) *A Companion to Marx's Grundrisse* (Verso Books)

Harvey, D., Riley, M. (2005) Country stories: the use of oral histories of the countryside to challenge the sciences of the past and future, *Interdisciplinary Science Reviews* (30:1)

Harvey, D., Riley, M. (2009) 'Fighting from the fields': developing the British 'National Farm' in the Second World War, *Journal of Historical Geography* (35)

Holloway, L., Mahon, N., Clark, B., Proctor, A. (2023) Living with cows, sheep and endemic disease in the North of England: Embodied care, biosocial collectivities and killability, *Environment and Planning E* (6:2)

Holt Giménez, E. (2017) *A Foodie's Guide to Capitalism* (Monthly Review Press)

Hubbard, C. (2019) *Brexit: How might UK Agriculture Thrive or Survive? Final Report*, UK Research and Innovation, https://research.ncl.ac.uk/esrcbrexitproject/outputs/Final%20Report%20Brexit%20and%20Agriculture%20March2019.pdf Accessed 20/3/26

Krzywoszynska, A. (2016) What farmers know: Experiential knowledge and care in vine growing, *Sociologia Ruralis* (56:2)

Law, J. (2010) Care and killing: Tensions in veterinary practice, in, Mol, A., Moser, I., Pols, J. (eds.) *Care in practice: On tinkering in clinics, homes and farms* (Transcript)

Lingham, S., Kowalska, A., Kowalska, J., Manning, L. (2025) The Impact of Brexit on UK Food Standards and Food Security: Perspectives on the Repositioning of Neoliberal Food Policy, *Foods* (14:9)

Lowe, P., Murdoch, J., Marsden, T., Munton, R., Flynn, A. (1993) Regulating the New Rural Spaces: the Uneven Development of Land, *Journal of Rural Studies* (9:3)

Martin, A., Myers, N., Viseu, A. (2015) The Politics of Care in Technoscience, *Social Studies of Science* (45:5)

Marx, K. (1990a[1867]) *Capital: Volume I* (Penguin Books)

Marx, K. (1990b[1885]) *Capital: Volume II* (Penguin Books)

McGuire, J M., Morton, L W., Arbuckle, J G., Cast, A D. (2015) Farmer identities and responses to the social-biophysical environment, *Journal of Rural Studies* (39)

Mies, M. (2014) *Patriarchy and Accumulation on a World Scale: Women in the international division of labour* (Bloomsbury Academic and Professional)

Mincyte, D., Bartkiene, A., Bikauskaite, R., Šakelaitė, I., Otte, P P. (2025) What does it mean to care in industrial agriculture? *Agriculture and Human Values* (42)

Murdoch, J., Ward, N. (1997) Governmentality and territoriality – the statistical manufacture of Britain's 'national farm', *Political Geography* (16)

Overstreet, K K. (2018) *'A Well-Cared For Cow Produces More Milk': The Biotechnics of (Dis)Assembling Cow Bodies in Wisconsin Dairy World*, UC Santa Cruz Electronic Thesis and Dissertations, https://escholarship.org/uc/item/3q05z3wb Accessed 25/9/25

Patel, R., Moore, J W. (2017) *A History of the World in Seven Cheap Things* (Verso Books)

Riley, M. (2016) How does longer term participation in agri-environment schemes [re]shape farmers' environmental dispositions and identities? *Land Use Policy* (52)

Rutt, R.L., Møller, A.S. (2025) Illuminating the care/repair nexus in the 'pandemic era', and the potential for care beyond repair in Danish poultry production, *Agriculture and Human Values* (42)

Saunders, F P. (2016) Complex Shades of Green: Gradually Changing Notions of the 'Good Farmer' in a Swedish Context, *Sociologia Ruralis* (56:3)

Singleton, V. (2010) Good farming control or care?, in, Mol, A., Ingunn, M., Pols, J. (eds.) *Care in practice: On tinkering in clinics, homes and farms* (Transcript)

Singleton, V. (2012) When Contexts Meet: Feminism and Accountability in UK Cattle Farming, *Science, Technology and Human Values* (37:4)

Singleton, V., Law, J. (2013) Devices as rituals. Notes on enacting resistance, *Journal of Cultural Economy* (6:3)

Smith, D. (1998) How far should we care? On the spatial scope of beneficence, *Progress in Human Geography* (22)

Sutherland L-A., Darnhofer, I. (2012) Of organic farmers and 'good farmers': changing habitus in rural England, *Journal of Rural Studies* (28)

Taverner, C. (2025) Paying the Price: Cheap food, big business and the cost to farming and food security, *Food, Farming and Countryside Commission*, https://ffcc-uk.files.svdcdn.com/production/assets/downloads/FFCC_False-Economy_report_part2_v5-1.pdf?dm=1741863510 Accessed 20/12/25

Tilzey, M. (2000) Natural Areas, the whole countryside approach and sustainable agriculture, *Land Use Policy* (17:4)

Tilzey, M. (2024) Ill Fares the Land: Confronting Unsustainability in the UK Food System through Political Agroecology and Degrowth, *Land* (13:5)

Tilzey, M., Potter, C. (2007) Neoliberalism, Neo-mercantalism, Multifunctionality: Contested Political Discourses in European Post-Fordist Rural Governance, in, Cheshire, L., Higgins, V., Lawrence, G. (eds.) *International Perspectives on Rural Governance: New Power Relations in Rural Economies and Societies* (Routledge)

Timmerman, C. (2018) Food security as a global public good, in, Vivero-Pol, J., Ferrando, T., De Schutter, O., Mattei, U. (eds.) *Routledge Handbook of Food as a Commons* (Routledge)

Tronto, J C. (1993) *Moral Boundaries: A Political Argument for an Ethic of Care* (Routledge)

Tronto, J. (2017) There is an alternative: *homines curans* and the limits of neoliberalism, *International Journal of Care and Caring* (1:1)

Wheeler, R., Morris, C., Lobley, M., Winter, M. (2018) 'The good guys are doing it anyway': the accommodation of environmental concern among English and Welsh farmers, *Environment and Planning E* (1:4)

Wheeler, R., Szaboova, L., Lobley, M. (2025) Informal support for mental health in farming communities: Understanding the experience of 'accidental counsellors', *Journal of Rural Studies* (120)

Wilson, G.A., Burton, R.J. (2015) 'Neo-productivist' agriculture: Spatio-temporal versus structuralist perspectives, *Journal of Rural Studies* (38)

Postlude

My surname is Bridgewater. In contrast to 'Grace' and 'Victoria' which are names that have grown on/with me, I have always loved my surname. It has a place-based meaning, a running theme throughout this thesis where I have told you the places I am from. The snippets of conversations with farmers have told us about the places they farm, the way they feel about these places, and their perspectives on what shapes this practice.

Mainly, I like my surname because of its colloquial connotations – that of connecting disparate landmasses and the often-troubled waters which run between them. This thesis has aimed to connect the landmasses of farmer lived experience with the more abstract worlds of policy and economics. This thesis has also aimed to connect the disparate landmasses of traditional, academic linguistic prose and the more creative, conversational language which people use to communicate meaning to each other. By doing this, I have attempted to bridge the gap between us – the author and the reader.

What is your name?

Appendix 1: Transcriber Confidentiality Agreement

This research is being undertaken by Grace Bridgewater, PhD candidate at Lancaster Environment Centre, Lancaster University. The purpose of this research is to explore the experiences of farmers as members of the agricultural industry and better understand how they farm, why they farm, and what variables impact their practice and visions of the future of farming.

As a transcriber of this research, we understand that we will be hearing recordings of confidential interviews. The information on these recordings has been revealed by interviewees who agreed to participate in this research on the condition that their interviews remain confidential. We understand that we have a responsibility to honour this confidentiality agreement.

We agree not to share any information on these recordings, about any party, with anyone except the researcher of this project. Any violation of this and the terms detailed below would constitute a serious breach of ethical standards and we confirm that we will adhere to the agreement in full.

We, UK Transcription Ltd, agree to:

1. Keep all the research information shared with us confidential by not discussing or sharing the content of the interviews in any form or format with anyone other than the Researcher.
2. Keep all research information in any form or format secure while it is in my possession.
3. Return all research information in any form or format to the Researcher when we have completed the transcription tasks.
4. After consulting with the Researcher, erase or destroy all research information in any form or format regarding this research project that is not returnable to the Researcher (e.g. CDs, information stored on our computer hard drive).

Transcriber

Print Name: Lindsey Prudhoe, Sales Manager, for UK Transcription Ltd.

Transcriber, Signature: LINDSEY PRUDHOE

Date: 31 May 2023

Researcher

Print Name: Grace Bridgewater

Researcher, Signature:

GRACE BRIDGEWATER

Date: 31 May 2023

Appendix 2: Written Certification by Co-Author

Regarding: "*Evil accountants*" and "*the biggest bastards in the country*": Productivism, post-productivism and farmer perceptions of supermarket power in the UK (Chapter 5 of this thesis)

I can confirm that my contributions to this article are proportional to that described in this thesis, and that the majority of the work was completed by the PhD Student, Grace Bridgewater.

Co-Author and Supervisor Name:

Dr Emma Cardwell

Co-Author and Supervisor Signature:

EMMA CARDWELL

PhD Student Name:

Grace Bridgewater

PhD Student Signature:

GRACE BRIDGEWATER

Date: 29/3/26

Written certification by co-author, as required by Lancaster University's Manual of Academic Regulations and Procedures 2025-26, Postgraduate Research Regulations, Appendix 2: 20(c)