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Constrained Entrepreneurship: Exploring how English upland farmers are responding to the socio-political challenges in the beef and sheep sector.

By Peter Gittins

Supervised by: Dr John Lever and Dr James Scott Vandeventer

A thesis submitted to the University of Huddersfield in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy – September 2021



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## **Abstract**

This thesis explores the lived experiences of English upland farmers during a time of political and economic uncertainty. It examines the constraints and challenges impacting farmers and their businesses during agricultural, rural and environmental policy transformations through a time of Brexit and COVID-19. The overarching research question explores the strategies upland beef and sheep farmers in England are using to manage their farm businesses in response to the socio-political challenges facing the sector. It is an exploratory study that engages with farmers and other agricultural industry stakeholders to understand how entrepreneurship and strategic management practices manifest in upland farming businesses. A novel qualitative methodology is used that draws heavily on the 'industry insider' positionality, using a multi-methods approach to explore the research question. Three units of assessment are analysed: farmers, farm businesses and the activities and processes connected to the farm. As a result, academic, practice and policy-based contributions are produced through the findings. The upland farmer segmentation framework is created, serving as a useful data collection and analytical tool to analyse the multiple units of assessment. A theoretical contribution has been made to the farm entrepreneurship literature, applying Max Weber's metaphor of the iron cage to investigate constrained entrepreneurship in the context of upland farming. Empirical and theoretical contributions have been made, creating Weberian influenced ideal types of farmers, farm businesses and farm business strategies that provide a nuanced understanding into the constrained institutional contexts that upland farmers operate within. Findings suggest that great heterogeneity exists amongst English upland farmers, with personal, economic, social and environmental challenges constraining effective farm entrepreneurship.

**Keywords** Farm entrepreneurship, strategic management, rural sociology, agriculture, Weber.

## Table of Contents

<i>Chapter One:</i> .....	15
<i>Rationale, Research Questions and Structure</i> .....	15
<i>1.0 Introduction</i> .....	15
<i>1.1 Rationale</i> .....	16
<i>1.2 Research Questions, Aim and Objectives</i> .....	18
<i>1.3 Main Research Contributions</i> .....	21
<i>1.4 Thesis Structure</i> .....	22
<i>1.5 Chapter summary</i> .....	26
<i>Chapter 2:</i> .....	27
<i>Contextual Chapter</i> .....	27
<i>2.0 Introduction</i> .....	27
<i>2.1 Historical Development of UK Agriculture</i> .....	28
<i>Farmers 1840- Present: Timeline</i> .....	30
<i>2.2 Common Agricultural Policy</i> .....	34
<i>2.3 Domestic Agricultural Policy</i> .....	36
<i>2.4 Overview: Upland Farming</i> .....	38
<i>2.4.1 Upland Farming</i> .....	38
<i>2.4.2 Political and Economic</i> .....	40
<i>2.4.3 Social Challenges</i> .....	42
<i>2.4.4 Technology</i> .....	44
<i>2.4.5 Legal</i> .....	44
<i>2.4.6 Environmental</i> .....	45
<i>2.4.7 PESTLE Implications</i> .....	46
<i>2.4.8 Emergent Challenges</i> .....	47
<i>2.5 Chapter Summary</i> .....	48
<i>Chapter Three: Literature Review</i> .....	49
<i>3.0 Introduction</i> .....	49
<i>3.1 Entrepreneurship</i> .....	52
<i>3.1.1 Who is an entrepreneur? Is it still a question worth asking?</i> .....	54
<i>3.1.2 Entrepreneurial characteristics</i> .....	56

3.1.3 Entrepreneurship summary .....	58
3.2 Rural Entrepreneurship .....	58
3.2.1 What is rural? .....	60
3.2.2 The Rural-Urban Divide.....	61
3.2.3 Rural entrepreneurship or entrepreneurship in the rural? .....	63
3.2.4 Spatial context and constrained entrepreneurship .....	66
3.2.5 Rural entrepreneurship summary.....	68
3.3 Farmers as Entrepreneurs .....	69
3.3.1 Areas for Investigation.....	70
3.3.2 Entrepreneurial Identity: Farmers as entrepreneurs.....	71
3.3.3 Family Entrepreneurship .....	76
3.3.4 Institutions and Entrepreneurship .....	79
3.3.5 Farm Entrepreneurship Methodologies.....	83
3.3.6 Further Research .....	84
3.4 Strategic Entrepreneurship in Farming Businesses .....	85
3.4.1 Strategic entrepreneurship.....	85
3.4.2 The Competitive Environment .....	87
3.4.3 Farm Management Decision Making (FMDM) .....	88
3.4.4 Responding to Challenges in the External Environment .....	89
3.4.5 Strategic Thinking Capabilities .....	92
3.5 Summary .....	95
Chapter Four:.....	96
Conceptual Framework, The Upland Farmer Segmentation Framework.....	96
4.0Introduction .....	96
4.1 Existing strategic management frameworks .....	97
4.1.1 Porter's Generic Strategies .....	97
4.1.2 Ansoff Matrix.....	101
4.1.3 Summary of Strategic Management Frameworks .....	105
4.2 Introducing the Farmer Segmentation Framework.....	105
4.2.1 Personal Characteristics of Farmers.....	106
4.2.2 Business Characteristics.....	108

4.2.3 Business Activities and Processes .....	109
4.3 Adapting and applying the Farmer Segmentation Framework.....	112
4.5 Chapter Summary.....	114
Chapter Five:.....	115
Theoretical Underpinning, Max Weber's Iron Cage .....	115
5.0 Introduction .....	115
5.1 Context to Weber's Work .....	116
5.1.1 Verstehen .....	117
5.1.2 Legitimation.....	118
5.1.3 Ideal Types .....	121
5.1.4 Why Weber? .....	122
5.2 Introducing the Iron Cage .....	125
5.2.1 Weberian Concepts .....	128
5.3 Theory.....	131
5.3.1 What is Theory and How is it Used? .....	132
5.3.2 Theory in Farming Studies .....	134
5.4 Criticisms of the iron cage.....	136
5.4 Chapter Summary.....	141
Chapter Six: .....	143
Methodology chapter .....	143
6.0 Introduction .....	143
6.1 My worldview: Interpretivism.....	144
6.1.1 Worldviews .....	145
6.1.2 My Philosophical Assumptions.....	147
6.1.3 Conceptualising the research process and exploring my own philosophical influences .....	152
6.2 Research context .....	157
6.2.1 Recalling the Research questions and aim .....	158
6.2.2 Research design.....	160
6.3 Research Locations and Participants Overview .....	161
6.3.1 Yorkshire .....	166

6.3.2 Lancashire .....	168
6.3.3 Cumbria .....	168
.....	169
6.3.4 Exmoor.....	169
6.3.5 Farmers and agricultural stakeholders.....	170
6.4 Research Strategies and Data Collection.....	174
6.4.1 Qualitative Methodology .....	176
6.4.2 Phenomenology.....	176
6.4.3 Ethnography.....	179
6.4.4 Case Studies .....	184
6.5 Data Analysis .....	185
6.5.1 Presenting Qualitative Data.....	192
6.5.2 Abductive analysis: systematic combining .....	195
6.6 Data Access, Sampling and Ethics.....	197
6.6.1 Data Access .....	197
6.6.2 Sampling.....	199
6.6.3 Ethics, anonymity and confidentiality.....	199
6.7 Reflections.....	200
6.8 Chapter Summary.....	203
Chapter Seven: .....	204
Heterogeneity in the English Uplands.....	204
7.0 Introduction .....	204
7.1 Recalling the Upland Farmer Segmentation Framework .....	205
7.2 Personal Characteristics of Upland Farmers .....	206
7.2.1 Gender: Is farming still a male dominated industry? .....	207
7.2.2 Age of farm holder.....	213
7.2.3 Education .....	216
7.2.4 Ownership Status .....	221
7.3 Upland Business characteristics.....	223
7.3.1 Farm size .....	224
7.3.2 Topography and location .....	227

7.3.3 Livestock system.....	231
7.4 Business Activities and Processes .....	235
7.4.1 Support Networks.....	236
7.4.2 Farm Technology and Innovation.....	239
7.4.3 Strategic thinking .....	244
7.4.4 Segmentation Summary.....	246
7.5 Constraints and challenges facing English upland beef and sheep farmers.....	246
7.5.1 Personal Constraints .....	249
7.5.2 Political and Economic Constraints.....	252
7.5.3 Social Constraints .....	258
7.5.4 Environmental Challenges .....	262
7.5.5 COVID-19 Constraints.....	270
7.6 Chapter Summary.....	278
Chapter Eight:.....	279
Theorizing Constrained Entrepreneurship in the English Uplands .....	279
8.0 Introduction .....	279
8.1 A typology of farmers and their farm business strategies.....	280
8.1.1 Traditionalist farmers .....	281
8.1.2 Entrepreneurial Farmers .....	282
8.1.3 The farmer as a Businessperson .....	283
8.1.4 Hobbyist and Part-Time Farmers .....	285
8.1.5 Environmentally Conscious Farmers.....	286
8.1.6 Constrained Entrepreneurs .....	288
8.1.7 Typology Reflection and Implications .....	289
8.2 Theorising Through the Iron Cage .....	291
8.2.1 The Weberian Iron Cage (Stahlhartes Gehäuse).....	293
A Cage within a Cage. Mike's Battle with Bureaucracy: TB, Satellite Mapping and a Global Pandemic. ....	295
A Story of Constrained Entrepreneurship. A Clash Between Landlords and Tenants. ....	301
8.2.2 The Protective Cage .....	306
8.2.3 The Cage is Neutral.....	308

<i>8.2.4 A Different Perspective on the Cage Metaphor .....</i>	<b>312</b>
<i>Replacing the Traditionalist Farmer: The Decline of the Small Family Farm.....</i>	<b>315</b>
<i>Does Size Matter? A Smallholding with Big Contributions Bridging the Rural-Urban Divide .....</i>	<b>321</b>
<i>8.5 Chapter Summary.....</i>	<b>326</b>
<i>Chapter Nine:.....</i>	<b>328</b>
<i>Conclusions and Recommendations.....</i>	<b>328</b>
<i>9.0 Introduction .....</i>	<b>328</b>
<i>9.1 Achieving the research aims and objectives .....</i>	<b>328</b>
<i>9.3 Research Contributions.....</i>	<b>335</b>
<i>9.3.1 Academic Contributions.....</i>	<b>336</b>
<i>9.3.2 Implications for Practice.....</i>	<b>341</b>
<i>9.3.3 Policy Implications .....</i>	<b>342</b>
<i>9.4 Limitations and Further Research .....</i>	<b>346</b>
<i>9.5 Concluding Thoughts.....</i>	<b>349</b>
<i>References .....</i>	<b>353</b>
<i>Appendix 1 Ethics.....</i>	<b>386</b>



## List of Figures

Figure 2.1 The development of UK agriculture.....	30
Figure 2.3 Historical Development of the CAP .....	34
Figure 3 Figure 2.4.1 UK Upland Areas (RSPB, 2013:8).....	39
Figure 2.4.2 Rural-Urban Wages Source (Matthews, 2021b) .....	40
Figure 3.0 Areas of Literature Reviewed .....	50
Figure 3.1 Summary of Emerging Concepts (Author Generated).....	52
Figure 3.1 Key Contributors to Entrepreneurship Research (Hebert & Link, 1989:41) .....	53
Figure 3.2 Common Themes in Rural Enterprise Research (McElwee and Smith, 2014: 437).....	59
Figure 3.2.2 Rural-Urban Classification (ONS, 2011).....	61
Figure 3.2.4 Typology Framework (Müller and Korsgaard, 2018).....	66
Figure 3.3.3 Family Farm and Venture Creation (Jervell, 2011:57) .....	77
Figure 4.1.1: Porter's (1980) GSM .....	98
Figure 4.1.2 Application to the Ansoff Matrix (Ansoff, 1957).....	102
Figure 4.3 Adapted Upland Farmer Segmentation Framework (Author Generated) .....	112
Figure 5.1.4 Incorporating Symbolic Interactionism.....	124
Figure 5.4 Theoretical Framework (Author Generated).....	141
Figure 6.1.3 M. C. Escher (1953) 'Relativity' .....	152
Figure 6.1.3 Plato's Cave (Francois, 2011) .....	154
Figure 6.3 Farm mapping (author generated) (DEFRA ordinance survey map) .....	164
Figure 6.3.1 (Google Maps) Moorlands Aerial View .....	165
Figure 6.3.2 Lancashire research site (Google maps, 2021) .....	168
Figure 6.3.3 Lake District National Park (Google maps, 2021) .....	169
Figure 6.3.4 Exmoor National Park (Google Maps, 2021) .....	170
Figure 6.5.1 Using annotations in NVivo (Author Generated).....	188
Figure 6.5.3 Theme generation (Author Generated) .....	190
Figure 6.5.4 (Reviewing the themes) (Author Generated) .....	191
Figure 7.2.3 education (author generated) .....	216
Figure 7.2.4 Ownership status (Author Generated).....	221
Figure 7.3.1 Farm size .....	224
Figure 7.3.2 location of farms .....	227
Figure 7.3.3 types of livestock systems .....	231
Figure 7.4.1 Support Networks.....	236
Figure 8.2 Realising Weber's metaphor of the iron cage through Escher's work .....	292
Figure 8.2.3 Strategic Choices Matrix.....	311

## List of Tables

Table 3.2.2 Rural and Urban areas.....	62
Table 3.2.3 Rural Typology Examples (Author Generated).....	65
Table 3.3.1: Summary of potential future farm entrepreneurship research (author generated) .....	71
Table 3.3.2 Farmer Typologies (McElwee, 2008) .....	73
Table 4.2.1 Personal Characteristics (McElwee, 2008) .....	106
Table 4.2.2 Business Characteristics .....	108
Table 4.2.3 Business Activities and Processes .....	110
Table 5.1.2 Ideal Types of Legitimacy .....	120
Table 5.3: “Types of Cages.....	139
Table 6.1.1 overview of research paradigms.....	146
Table 6.2.2 Methodology summary .....	161
Table 6.3.5 English upland farmer interviews (Segmentation Framework) .....	172
Table 6.3.5 Industry stakeholders.....	173
Table 6.4 Data Collection Instruments.....	176
Table 7.2 Profiling farmers through the segmentation framework (Author Generated) .....	207
Table 8.1 Types of upland farmers and their strategies .....	281
Table 8.1.1 traditional farmer type .....	281
Table 8.1.2 entrepreneurial farmers .....	282
Table 8.1.3 Farmers as businesspeople .....	284
Table 8.1.4 Hobbyist and part-time farmers .....	285
Table 8.1.5 Environmentally conscious farmers .....	286
Table 8.1.6 Constrained entrepreneurs .....	288

## Acknowledgements

First, I would like to acknowledge my family for their support and patience throughout my doctoral studies. To my fiancé, Eveangelina Watkin and our two children, Grace and Athena Gittins, your patience and support have been essential in helping me complete this work.

I would like to express my gratitude to my supervisory team, who have provided their continued support and guidance throughout. Thank you, Dr Gerard McElwee, for allowing me to undertake this work under your excellent supervision; your advice on everything relating to the PhD and beyond has been essential in my professional development. I would also like to thank Dr John Lever and Dr James Scott Vandeventer for your continued support, providing me with feedback and helping me develop my critical thinking. Without this support, this PhD thesis would not exist.

Finally, I would like to thank all those who have assisted with the research. Thank you to all farmer and agricultural stakeholders for taking time out of your busy day to chat with me. I am also incredibly grateful to the connections I have made at the Rural Entrepreneurship Conference, Institute for Small Business and Entrepreneurship and Countryside Community and Research Institute, who have played a vital role in helping me refine my ideas

## List of Publications and Research Output

1. Gittins, P. 2021c. I'm a sheep and cattle farmer in England, and Brexit has left farmers in fear for their futures. The Conversation. [Post Brexit Farming](#)
2. Gittins, P. 2021b. Entering the ivory tower: A farmer's perspective. *Sentio: An Interdisciplinary Social Science Journal*. (Accepted: In Press).
3. Gittins, P. and Morland, L., 2021a. Is 'Growing Better' ripe for development? Creating an urban farm for social impact. *The International Journal of Entrepreneurship and Innovation*, p.14657503211000576.
4. Gittins 2020b. Simulating livestock systems: farm technology and software adoption in the hills. RuSource Briefing. [RuSource Briefing Simulating Livestock Systems](#)
5. Gittins, P., McElwee, G. and Tipi, N., 2020a. Discrete event simulation in livestock management. *Journal of Rural Studies*, 78, pp.387-398.
6. Gittins, P. 2019. Farm Innovation and Technology Adoption: Drivers, Barriers and Success Factors. ISBE Conference 14-15th November 2019. (Awarded Best Paper in Rural Enterprise Track). [Farm Innovation and Technology Adoption](#)

## List of Abbreviations

AHDB- Agriculture and Horticulture Development Board.

BSE- Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy

CAP- Common Agricultural Policy

CIC- Constrained Institutional Context

COVID-19- Coronavirus

CSS- Countryside Stewardship Scheme

DAP- Domestic Agricultural Policy

DEFRA- Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs

EEC- European Economic Community

EI- Entrepreneurial Identity

ELMs- Environmental Land Management schemes

EU- European Union

FBI- Farm Business Income

FI- Family Entrepreneurship

FMD- Foot and Mouth Disease

FSF- Farmer Segmentation Framework

IE- Institutional Entrepreneurship

LoC- Locus of Control

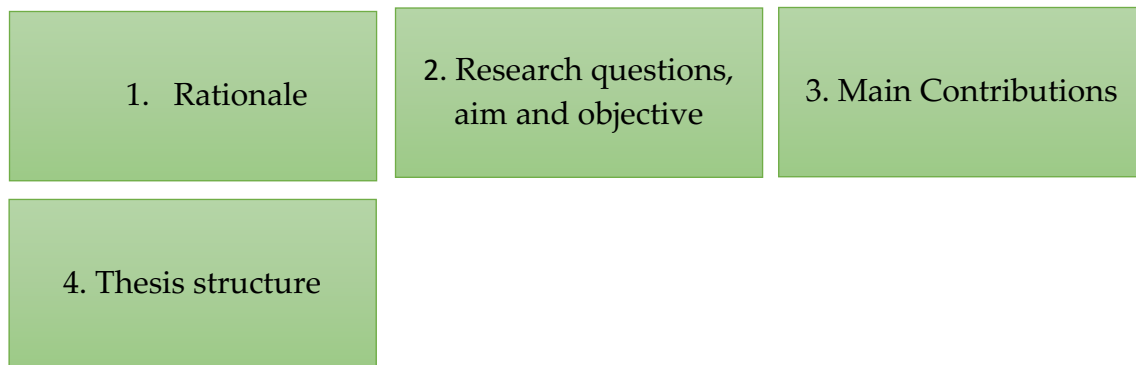
NFU- National Farmers Union

N-Ach- Need for Achievement

TB- Bovine Tuberculosis

UK- United Kingdom

## Chapter One: Rationale, Research Questions and Structure



### 1.0 Introduction

This thesis highlights the present realities facing English upland farmers. Contextually, English upland farming is a neglected area in management research, and this thesis is then concerned with exploring the economic and structural issues facing farmers. Throughout this thesis, the business strategies used by farmers to respond to the contemporary challenges and constraints present in the beef and sheep sector are explored. The findings generated provide insight into how entrepreneurship and strategic management practices manifest within the context of upland farming businesses.

This chapter is structured as follows. First, a rationale for undertaking this research is provided, arguing why it is necessary (Section 1.1). Also, the motivations for undertaking this study are discussed. Second, the over-arching research question, aim and objectives are outlined (Section 1.2), which derive from the literature review in chapter three. Third, the main contributions are discussed, highlighting this research's academic, practice, and policy implications (Section 1.3). Fourth, the thesis structure is outlined, summarising the contents of each chapter (Section 1.4).

## 1.1 Rationale

The following sub-section presents a research rationale, discussing: the timely nature of this work and my positionality as an 'industry insider'. It is argued that upland farming is a neglected research context worthy of further study.

The UK's agricultural sector is undergoing its most significant change in recent history (Downing and Coe, 2018). Since 1973, the UK has been subjected to the terms of the European Union's (EU) Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), which arguably has created a UK farming culture dependent on European subsidy support. Farming subsidies under the Basic Payment Scheme (BPS) are now being phased out over the next seven years, following the UK's exit from the EU (i.e., 'Brexit') and the creation of a Domestic Agricultural Policy (DAP). This DAP, through the passage of the Agriculture Act (2020), aims to build upon CAP criticisms, delinking payments from landownership and rewarding farmers for the production of environmental services through Environmental Land Management schemes (ELMs) (Defra, 2018). This is a controversial change to agricultural policy, potentially leaving many farmers fearing for their futures (Gittins, 2021c).

Upland farmers are at risk with the planned removal of support payments, whereby BPS can comprise up to 90% of a farmer's annual income (Abboud, 2018). These macro-economic changes mean that some farmers will be rethinking their current farm business strategies, potentially utilising entrepreneurial and strategic thinking capabilities to respond to policy shifts (Gittins et al., 2020). Despite an EU trade deal being made, alongside the Agriculture Act (2020) becoming law, the future for the English uplands remains uncertain (Binns, 2021; Cobb, 2021). Thus, this thesis explores the constraints facing upland farmers during these unprecedented times.

My positionality has also motivated me to pursue this research topic. To draw on my insider status here, 'I am of the land', someone who lives and works on an upland farm and experiences some of the realities discussed in this work. If I am to put this subjectively, this research has been a meaningful and rewarding experience. I believe more empirical research should seek to understand the issues facing [upland] farmers, especially during these unprecedented times of Brexit and COVID-19.

Entering academia and pursuing a doctoral degree from a practical farming background has allowed me to see a lack of management studies situated in farming contexts. I can use my practical work experience to help me unearth the realities facing farmers, drawing on the strengths of my insider positionality to understand how farmers are managing their businesses in response to these sectoral challenges. I realise that scholarly work can generate a significant impact, leading to further discussions and developments by scholars within the field, the findings adopted in practice, and policy being changed. The findings of this work may help relieve some of these constraints facing upland farmers, encouraging farm entrepreneurship to assist farmers like me. Clearly, this industry insider positionality has played a motivating factor in pursuing the research topic, alongside influencing the methodology. However, I have been cautious of it and made sure to limit my own personal bias when necessary. By becoming involved and detached throughout the research process and reflecting on my own subjectivity, aided by an on-going research diary, I have been able to balance my positionality. Further discussions around my positionality are returned to in chapter six.

Indeed, rural and farming contexts have been overlooked in the entrepreneurship literature, with agricultural businesses receiving little scholarly attention compared to urban enterprises (Fitz-Koch et al., 2018). Farm entrepreneurship within the context of English upland businesses is one topic that has not been well explored, and it deserves further attention given the current macro-economic climate. This research



puts upland farmers' issues at the focal point of the investigation, seeking to understand how farmers respond to the beef and sheep sector challenges.

The thesis's research questions and objectives are now outlined.

## 1.2 Research Questions, Aim and Objectives

The overarching research question and aim can be summarised as follows: What strategies are upland beef and sheep farmers in England using to manage their farm businesses in response to the socio-political challenges facing the sector? It is an exploratory study that seeks to engage with farmers and other agricultural industry stakeholders to understand how entrepreneurship and strategic management practices manifest in upland farming businesses.

This overarching research question is underpinned by two sub-research questions identified in the literature review chapter (chapter three):

Research Question 1 (RQ1): To what extent are English upland farmers using entrepreneurial strategies to respond to the realities in the beef and sheep sector?

- To conceptualise upland farmers as entrepreneurs and strategists to understand the nature of farm business strategies used to respond to the realities facing farmers (Objective 1).
- To empathetically explore (*verstehen*) the lived experiences of upland farmers and understand the realities impacting them and their farm businesses (Objective 2).

RQ1 is used to help explore the types of farm business strategies used by farmers to respond to the realities within the sector. To answer this RQ, theories, themes and concepts from the entrepreneurship and strategic management literature, such as

Entrepreneurial Orientation (EO) (Lumpkin and Dees, 1996) and Strategic Thinking Capabilities (STC) (Liedtka, 1998) are used to help conceptualise farmers as entrepreneurs and as strategists. Two research objectives underpin RQ1. The first objective requires me to develop a conceptual understanding of farmers as entrepreneurs and as strategists. Whilst objective two introduces *how* the research question will be answered by drawing on the philosophical concept of *verstehen* (introduced in chapter five) to explore the realities facing English upland farmers.

Research Question 2 (RQ2): How might the challenges facing English upland beef and sheep farmers be constraining of entrepreneurial activity?

- To explore how Max Weber's iron cage metaphor can be used as a theoretical lens to investigate the concept of 'constrained entrepreneurship' in the upland farm sector (Objective 3).
- Objective 4: To recognise the areas where upland farmers may require greater support to manage the constraints facing their farm businesses (Objective 4).

RQ2 is developed from the literature and theoretical underpinning chapters. The concept of 'constrained entrepreneurship', how endogenous and exogenous factors limit business activities (de Bruin and Dupuis, 2000; Refai and McElwee, 2019), is used to help explore the challenges facing farm businesses. A key theoretical underpinning informs this RQ of this thesis: Weber's iron cage metaphor (Objective 3) (Weber, 2003). Both Dias et al. (2019) and Fitz-Koch et al. (2018:32) in their literature reviews on agricultural entrepreneurship, found a lack of agricultural studies where authors have explicitly cited a theoretical base, suggesting future research should incorporate a sound theoretical underpinning to better 'contextualize entrepreneurial phenomena' and to 'contribute to the mainstream entrepreneurship literature'. A theoretical contribution can be made by using Weber's iron cage to explore the concept of

‘constrained entrepreneurship’ in an upland farming context. Thus, providing a nuanced understanding of the areas where upland farmers may require greater support to manage the constraints facing their farm businesses (Objective 4).

As farmers are the social group analysed throughout this thesis, it is useful to define what is meant by the term ‘farmer.’ The following definition is used to define a farmer:

‘Those occupied on a part- or full-time basis and engaged in a range of activities that are primarily dependent on the farm and agriculture in the practice of cultivating the soil, growing crops and raising livestock as the main source of income (McElwee, 2008:467).

This thesis is concerned with analysing three units of assessment. First, the role of the farmer is explored, understanding the personal characteristics of farmers and the impact they have to the farm business. Second, the farm business/enterprise is analysed. Here a farm enterprise is defined as the space in which farmers occupy for agricultural purposes, comprising of land, livestock, machinery and all the other necessities for the business to function. Third, the businesses activities and processes connected to the farm enterprise are analysed, providing insight into the entrepreneurial and strategic nature of farmers and their enterprises. Analysing multiple units of analysis, allows for a deeper understanding of entrepreneurial phenomena within certain contexts (Low and Macmillan, 1988).

The research questions and objectives are used as a guide to explore the complex phenomenon of farm entrepreneurship in the context of English upland farming. The thesis structure is now introduced.

### 1.3 Main Research Contributions

To summarise briefly, several academic, practice and policy-based contributions are produced through this doctoral work. This research adds to the limited body of work on farm entrepreneurship (McElwee, 2006b; Vesala et al., 2007; Yoshida et al., 2020; Lokier et al., 2021), conceptualising ‘upland farmers as entrepreneurs’ through the creation of various farmer types. Typologies of farm business strategies used to respond to constraints and challenges are created, moving conceptualisation beyond ‘farmers as entrepreneurs’ and conceptualising upland farmers ‘as strategists’ and ‘strategic entrepreneurs’ by incorporating theories and discussions from the field of strategic management (Heracleous, 1998). This research considers how upland farmers have responded to the ongoing challenges, from responding to personal farm business constraints to the wider economic, social and environmental challenges. Moreover, it shows how upland farmers have responded [entrepreneurially] to the constraints and challenges resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic, contributing to the existing crisis management literature in rural contexts (Phillipson et al., 2020).

This research also uses Weber’s (2003) metaphor of the iron cage to provide a ‘strong theoretical underpinning’ to investigate the complex worlds of farmers, something which Suess-Reyes and Fuetsch (2016) found to be lacking in the rural studies literature. Moreover, the upland farmer segmentation framework has been created to serve as a data collection and analytical tool to analyse upland farmers and their businesses, which other rural research scholars can use.

A methodological contribution has also been made by reflecting on my industry insider positionality. It is argued that an interpretative/constructionist approach leads to new knowledge regarding entrepreneurial practices in upland enterprises. This approach grounds this work in empiricism, interacting with farmers and agricultural stakeholders to collect primary data which has a practical impact, allowing me to

understand farmer concerns and report this back to industry stakeholders, such as the National Farmers Union (NFU) and Agriculture and Horticulture Development Board (AHDB). The output of this work has led to work being produced for readers outside of the academic circles and those working in practice-based roles (See. Gittins, 2021c). This research captures the current concerns of farmers during upcoming policy changes, reporting on the lived experiences of farmers during a state of agricultural transformation and transition (DEFRA, 2021). By understanding the lived experiences of upland farmers, policymakers can understand and implement measures to encourage effective farm entrepreneurship. A complete discussion around the exact contributions of this work is presented in chapter nine.

## 1.4 Thesis Structure

The following sections outline the subsequent chapters within the thesis.

Chapter one provides a rationale for undertaking the thesis. It discusses the motivations for pursuing the research topic, summarises the main research goals and objectives, sets out a clear structure and articulates the main research gaps filled through this work.

Chapter two provides a contextual overview of the thesis. The purpose of this chapter is to provide some essential background to this research, exploring emerging policy developments and media coverage around UK farming. A historical analysis is undertaken through a review of key developments in UK farming, leading to the design of the contemporary agricultural policy. This analysis serves as the backdrop for the remainder of the thesis, indicating some of its broader implications. These contextual discussions are returned to in the concluding chapter, which elaborates on the thesis's practical and policy-based implications (Section 9.2.3).

Chapter three positions this thesis within a relevant body of research, analysing work relating to the thesis topic, assessing the robustness of methods and theories used and identifying research gaps that are explored through this work. Research questions, concepts and themes emerge throughout this review that is explored in the data collection phase. This research positions itself within the business and management disciplines of entrepreneurship and strategic management, specifically from a rural agricultural context, while drawing upon a novel classical sociological underpinning. However, the findings have implications beyond these disciplines and expand to other business and management disciplines, such as operations management, alongside other areas of literature, such as agricultural/rural geographies, rural studies, agriculture, regional development studies and rural sociology.

The literature review shows that upland farming is a neglected context in management research terms. A limited body of work is identified to conceptualise 'farmers as entrepreneurs' (McElwee, 2006). This thesis builds on such efforts by conceptualising upland farmers as entrepreneurs by drawing on both trait-based (Carland et al., 1988) and behavioural approaches (Gartner, 1988) to entrepreneurship. Moreover, this farm entrepreneurship conceptualisation is extended by incorporating relevant debates from the areas of strategic management, such as strategic thinking capabilities, to conceptualise 'upland farmers as strategists and strategic entrepreneurs.' Moreover, other concepts, such as 'constrained entrepreneurship' (de Bruin and Dupuis', 2003) 'spatial context' (Müller and Korsgaard, 2018) and 'entrepreneurial bricolage' (Garud and Karnøe, 2003) are identified to understand the context in which [farm] entrepreneurs operate within. Throughout this chapter, the sub-research questions emerge, which are explored in the data collection phases.

Chapter four outlines a conceptual framework that is created to help analyse the complex worlds of farmers and their businesses. Existing strategic management frameworks were of little use when applied to farming businesses, so McElwee's

(2004; 2012) 'farmer segmentation framework' (FSF) is critically analysed and adapted, creating the upland farmer segmentation framework. It is used to analyse the personal characteristics, farm business characteristics and the business activities and processes connected to upland farming. This framework serves as a visual tool to help analyse the multiple units of analysis relating to farming enterprises. It is used as both an exploratory data collection device and an analytical tool to analyse the heterogenic nature of upland farmers.

Chapter five argues how Weber's metaphor of the 'iron cage' provides a suitable theoretical lens to explore de Bruin and Dupuis's (2003) concept of 'constrained entrepreneurship' within the context of upland farming. The purpose of this chapter is to provide a theoretical lens to help understand the overall research aim. Weber's work on the iron cage of bureaucracy and rationality has not been applied to the area of upland farm entrepreneurship, offering a research gap for this thesis to fill. The underpinning concepts of the metaphor - rationalization, bureaucracy, power, specialization, and social action - are discussed in relation to the research topic. Moreover, the criticisms of Weber's metaphor are presented through three cage variations, which are later discussed and theorized in the finding and discussion chapters regarding the entrepreneurship and strategic management concepts found within the literature review.

Chapter six presents the methodological approach, discussing my philosophical assumptions which guide this research, the research locations where the empirical data are collected, alongside the methods used to answer the research questions. An interpretative/constructionist approach is adopted to explore the different worldviews of farmers. I draw upon my own 'industry insider' approach and use a range of qualitative research methods, combining a mixture of phenomenological, ethnographic, and case study research. The data and analysis technique (i.e. thematic analysis) is presented (Braun and Clarke, 2012, and I discuss how my methodological

approach complements the theoretical and philosophical underpinnings. The implications of carrying out this research under lockdown due to the COVID-19 pandemic are also addressed, namely adapting to digital and remote data collection techniques and drawing more on the industry insider positionality to overcome any data access constraints. Following closely the work of other social scientist scholars enabled these lockdown related research issues to be mitigated in many ways (Jowett, 2020).

Chapters seven presents the empirical findings from the fieldwork. The results are discussed concerning the features of the upland farmer segmentation framework, highlighting a need for policymakers and scholars to consider the heterogenic nature of upland farmers. Moreover, the constraints and challenges limiting entrepreneurial activity are discussed, showing some examples of contemporary macro and micro level farm constraints currently impacting farmers.

Chapter eight discusses the theoretical implications of this work. Weberian influenced typologies of upland farmers and their farm business strategies are presented, before contextualizing the iron cage(s) metaphor in relation to the data. It is theorized that different types of farmers reside within the cage variants, utilising certain types of farm business strategies to respond to the institutional conditions of the cage. A discussion then follows around the conceptualisation of 'farmers as entrepreneurs and strategists', drawing upon short case studies to link the practices of farmers to some of the concepts identified within the literature review. The cage metaphor and its three variants provide useful imagery for policymakers to consider heterogeneity and approaches to entrepreneurship and strategic management in upland farms.

Finally, chapter nine concludes with a discussion around the academic, policy and practice contributions. The limitations of this work are also discussed, recognising further areas of research following this PhD and potential outputs of this thesis.



## 1.5 Chapter summary

This chapter has provided an overview of the thesis. The rationale, research questions, and overall contributions have been introduced to argue why further research is required into entrepreneurship and strategic management approaches within upland farm enterprises. The thesis explores the constraints and challenges facing English upland farmers, carried out during the agricultural, rural and environmental policy transformations during a time of both Brexit<sup>1</sup> and the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. The next chapter provides some essential contextual background.

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<sup>1</sup> Brexit- The term used to describe UK's exit from the European Union.

## Chapter 2: Contextual Chapter

2. Historical  
Development of  
UK Agriculture

1. The Common  
Agricultural Policy

3. UK Domestic  
Agricultural Policy

4. UK Farming

### 2.0 Introduction

This chapter provides some necessary contextual background to the thesis, highlighting historical, contemporary, and proposed changes to agricultural, rural and environmental policies relating to the worlds of upland farmers. The findings of this research contribute towards these policy discussions presented throughout this chapter.

It is structured as follows. First, an illustrative timeline from 1840 to the present day discusses historical events that have helped shape contemporary agricultural policy (Section 2.1). 1840 is the start of the timeline. It is a pivotal time in UK agricultural history, following a period of ongoing agricultural revolutions before a significant trade policy event in the nineteenth century, the repeal of the Corn Laws (Irwin and Chepeliev, 2020). Second, the EU's Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) foundations are introduced, discussing the role of farming subsidies in UK agriculture and CAP criticisms (Section 2.2). Third, the creation of a DAP in accordance with Brexit is then discussed and its implications to UK farmers (Section 2.3). Fourth, a discussion around the Political, Economic, Social, Technological, Legal and Environmental (PESTLE)

challenges facing farmers follows, helping to understand what is already known about the challenges facing farmers (Section 2.4). Farm income was identified as being particularly concerning for farmers (section 2.4.2). A PESTLE analysis helps contextualise this research, serving as a valuable framework to scan the external challenges facing farmers. This analysis is helpful as looking back at historical influences allows a nuanced understanding of farmers' challenges, showing factors that have helped shape current agricultural policy.

## 2.1 Historical Development of UK Agriculture

Agriculture is one of the oldest industries globally and is practised in a range of different manners depending upon geographical location. Historians believe that humans lived as hunter-gatherers until around 12,000 years ago, wandering nomadically and living off natural resources (Thirsk, 1985). Gradually, this was supplanted by agriculture.

UK Farming practices have changed significantly in recent years. Under feudalist systems, farmers engaged in subsistence farming, rearing livestock and growing crops to feed themselves and their families, providing a surplus to the gentry and noble classes above them (Shaw-Taylor, 2012). Indeed, forms of subsistence and peasantry modes of agriculture exist today and dominate certain regions; there is an increasing trend from peasantry agriculture to entrepreneurial farming (Van der Ploeg, 2016). As this feudalist system was subsumed by a capitalist mode of production and system which Weber (2003) wrote of in the Protestant Ethic, the role of the farmer also changed. Farmers began to serve domestic and global markets, adopt a capitalist spirit, and pursue private economic wealth accumulation like business owners in other industries (Bryer, 2006).

Farming is changing. Over 80% of the population used to work in farming roles, compared to just 0.5% of the UK population today (Jones, 2013). Farming is often socially constructed as a career path for those who lack academic skills, with agriculture being used as a punishment in some primary and secondary schools (Henriques, 2021). This thesis challenges this negative construction that farming is for those less abled and uneducated individuals, arguing that the modern-day farmer requires sufficient entrepreneurial skillsets and strategic thinking capabilities to respond effectively to the challenges in the sector. However, as is shown through this thesis, many contemporary farmers do, indeed, lack sufficient entrepreneurial skillsets and strategic thinking capabilities.

It is helpful to look back at the historical events which have helped shape contemporary agriculture. The following section presents a timeline and analysis of historical events from 1840 to today (Figure 2.1). 1840 is the beginning of this timeline as it was a pivotal time for agriculture, following a period of ongoing agricultural revolutions and political transitions.

## Farmers 1840- Present: Timeline

1840-1900	1908	1914-1918	1920-1935	1939-1945	1947-1970	1973-1975	1992-2000	2000-2015	2016-Present
Poor weather, disease outbreak and high food imports	Formation of the National Farmers Union	The Great War led to vulnerable supply chains	The great betrayal and rising political tensions	The second world war	The introduction of the Agriculture Act and CAP	Britain and Ireland join the ECC & referendum held (67%) remain	Introduction of Direct Payments, formation of the EU	CAP reform, FMD & horsemeat scandal	Brexit vote, negotiations, formation of DAP

Figure 2.1 The development of UK agriculture

Historically, there have been arguments both for and against offering support for farmers. The repeal of the Corn Laws in 1846, led by Robert Peel, meant that farmers were left without government support and faced high levels of overseas competition (Barnes, 2006). Overseas competitors supplied the UK with more affordable and higher quality goods than British farmers could produce (Brown, 1987). Through to the twentieth century, farmers faced increasing pressures, droughts and concurrent disease outbreaks within the pastoral sector. These pressures led to agricultural production favouring arable production and a period of economic uncertainty called the 'great agricultural depression' (Perry, 1972:30).

The dark realities facing farmers led to the National Farmers' Union (NFU) forming in 1908, a collective organisation that reported farmers' issues to the UK parliament (Cox et al., 1991). The formation of this membership organization meant that farmers could have a collective voice that reported farmer concerns. Since its formation, the NFU has played an active role in shaping policy and legislation, helping to support

national interests such as food production, international trade and, lately, environmental initiatives (NFU, 2021).

However, despite the formation of the NFU, it was not until the Great War (1914-1918) when the vulnerabilities of a food system that largely depended upon importations were realised, with self-sufficiency levels being at a record low (Brown, 1987). The war acted as a catalyst for the UK government to strengthen domestic agricultural production, setting up the Agricultural War Executive Committee. UK government invested in agricultural infrastructure, replacing horse-based agriculture with tractors, introducing 98,000 land girls and prisoners to compliment farm labour, and establishing a government 'price promise' aimed at stabilising the economy after nearly 40 years of agricultural depressions (Dewey, 1984).

Following these measures, many farmers began to run profitable businesses, with thousands purchasing farms from their landlords due to the 1920 Agriculture Act (Brown, 1987). However, soon after the war, the price promise was removed, known to farmers as the 'great betrayal' (Whetham, 1974). This protection removal led to rising farm labour costs. Farmers now had to keep up mortgage repayments or face losing their farm businesses to the bank (Brown, 1987).

With political tensions rising in Europe in 1935, the UK government took a proactive stance regarding agricultural food production, investing back into farm infrastructure to future-proof food supply chains (Brown, 1987). The second world war prompted the UK government to develop a sustainable and resilient food and farming sector. War technologies were utilised to increase farm productivity, providing farmers with fertilizers and other chemicals to improve yield quality and make efficiency gains (Martin, 2000). Moreover, several legislative acts were passed that introduced further protections for farmers. For example, the 1947 Agriculture Act guaranteed minimum prices and assured markets to favour domestic production, while the 1948

Agricultural Holdings Act improved farming infrastructure, offering grants to farms for long term improvements (Brown, 1987).

In 1957 the economic union between; France, Italy, Germany, Netherlands, Belgium and Luxembourg formed, with the CAP established in 1962 (Roederer-Rynning, 2010). Britain and Ireland joined the European Economic Community (EEC) in 1973, which later expanded to become what is known today as the EU (European Commission, 2019). A collaborative approach to food production meant that member states of the EU could operate under unified governing principles, regulating agricultural trade, and provide safe, affordable and cheap food to citizens.

In the early 1990s to mid-2000s, agricultural production was of media interest, with an outbreak of Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy<sup>2</sup> (Biogea, 2019). Likewise, in 2001 the Foot and Mouth Disease<sup>3</sup> (FMD) ravaged the pastoral sector, leading to over 6 million cattle and sheep being culled to contain the disease (McKie, 2021). These outbreaks pressured UK policymakers to understand the importance of traceability in food and farming supply chains.

In 2005, the Single Farm Payment (SFP) was introduced, which decoupled financial support from previous means of agricultural production previously linked to activity levels (Olagunju et al., 2020). Before 2005, farmers were rewarded for maximizing output (i.e., livestock numbers), leading to overproduction (Defra, 2018). In 2014 the CAP faced further reform, introducing Green Payments<sup>4</sup> to focus on environmental issues (European Commission, 2019) and the introduction of BPS in 2015. These policy

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<sup>2</sup> BSE- otherwise known as 'mad cow disease' is a disease which causes a neurological condition and could be passed on from animals to humans via consuming meat. Since this outbreak, traceability efforts have been in place to ensure food safety.

<sup>3</sup> Foot and Mouth Disease: A contagious airborne disease which can affect livestock, causing malnutrition stunting growth and milk production, resulting in economic losses.

<sup>4</sup> Greening Payments: payment for agricultural practices beneficial for the climate and environment (RPA, 2019).

changes changed how funding was provided to farmers, subsidies were provided to farmers based upon how much and what type of land farmers had, as opposed to rewarding more intensive agricultural practices with higher stocking densities and little environmental concern.

The horsemeat scandal in 2013 highlighted the extent to which food fraud exists within food and farming supply chains, calling for a government inquest into traceability of food production (Smith and McElwee, 2019). The consequences of the scandal called for stricter regulation in the 'farm to fork' journey, aimed at strengthening food safety, traceability and restoring trust in British food producers (Levitt, 2016).

Finally, Brexit and, more recently, COVID-19 have greatly impacted the food and farming sectors (Phillipson et al., 2020). Since 2016, Brexit discussions relating to food production, trade and environmental standards have been the subject of parliamentary debates (Downing and Coe, 2018). There has been significant uncertainty around UK-EU trade deals and the potential import/export tariff implications (Gesto-Casas, 2021). Alongside this, actors within the farming industry have been responding to the ongoing impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. While the UK government has set out the recovery strategy centred around 'Build Back Better' (OECD, 2021), the role of rural regions in this response has largely been ignored.

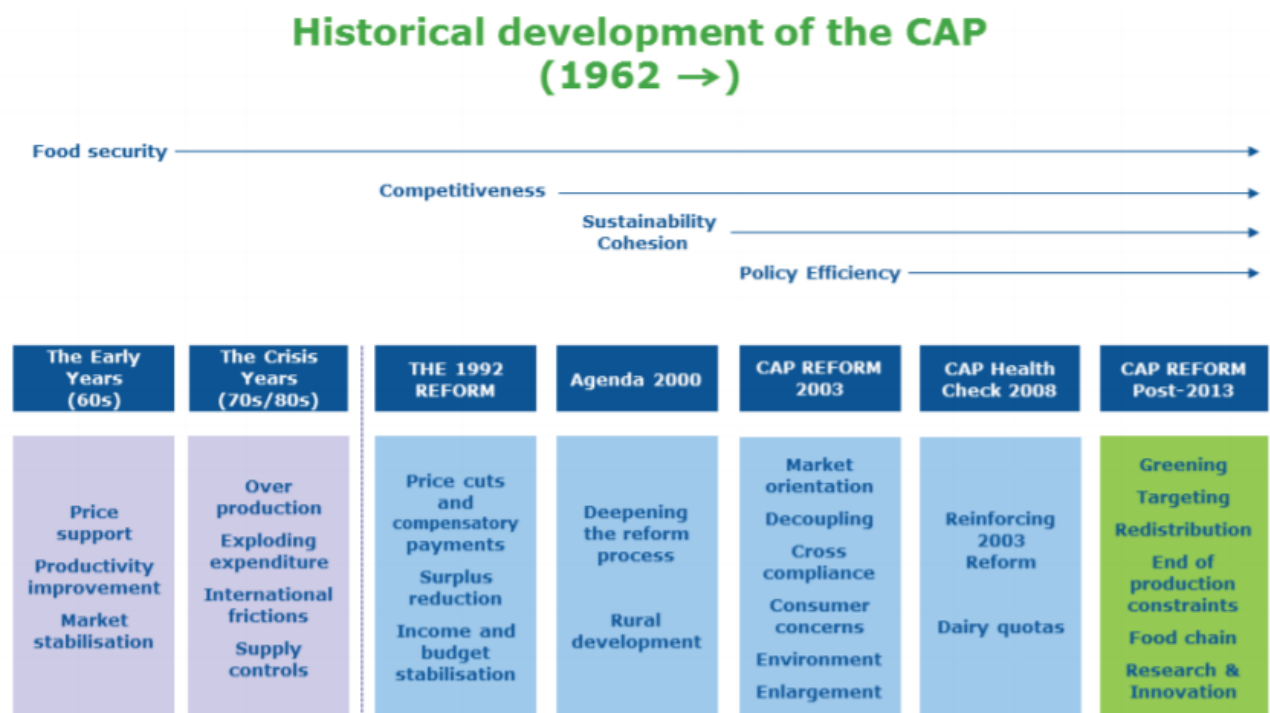
Indeed, the UK's agricultural sector has a rich historical background. Farmers have faced significant constraints impacting their businesses and lives, and they have continuously adapted to these challenges accordingly. In the context of these historical challenges, this thesis explores contemporary challenges facing farmers within a changing agricultural context, one which has been heavily influenced by Brexit-related policy change and the COVID-19 pandemic. The CAP is now explored in



greater depth, as it is a significant policy that is currently shaping the realities facing English upland farmers.

## 2.2 Common Agricultural Policy

**Figure 1. Historical development of the CAP from 1962**



Source: DG AGRI (2016)

**Figure 2.3 Historical Development of the CAP**

CAP derives from Pillar 1 (Direct Payments) and Pillar 2 (Rural Development Policy). In total, over €400 billion has been provided to EU countries in CAP payments since its creation in 1962. The CAP aims ‘to help provide a decent standard of living for European farmers and agricultural workers and a stable, varied and safe food supply for citizens’ (European Commission, 2017:1). 91% of CAP funding supports pillar 1 (direct payments), with only 9% of this funding supporting pillar 2, with almost £3 billion provided to UK farmers in 2019 (Gov.uk, 2019). While the aim of pillar 2 is to ‘foster the competitiveness of agriculture, ensure the sustainable management of natural resources, and achieve a balanced territorial development of rural economies

and communities, including the creation and maintenance of employment' (Jack, 2020: 1). Funding is allocated under Pillar 2 for various things, such as incentivising farmers to produce environmental services through agricultural and environmental schemes (European Commission, 2019). Arguably, however, the CAP has failed in its central aim of providing a decent standard of living to farmers, as many UK farmers make negligible business incomes, as is further discussed in this chapter (Section 2.4).

The EU's CAP has routinely undergone reform to increase the overall competitiveness of the agricultural sector (Matthews, 2021a). CAP reform aims to further the adoption of innovative practices, encourage sustainability, enhance rural resilience and improve farm productivity (European Commission, 2019). UK policymakers argued that the CAP should undergo further reform to emphasise payments for the second pillar, rural development, a similar approach to the UK's DAP (Defra, 2018). The EU's CAP has faced scrutiny and is labelled as 'an inhibitor of agricultural productivity' (DEFRA, 2018), with the UK government orientating policy away from subsidies based on land ownership.

The argument as to whether a subsidised industry is more effective than an unsubsidised agricultural sector is an ongoing debate raised by farmers, industry stakeholders, policy makers and the general public (Jenkins, 2020). While subsidies help keep food prices lower for the general public, farmers own private businesses, and questions arise around whether farmers should indeed be subsidised at all (Harrabin, 2020). Business owners in many other sectors do not receive subsidies, so some argue why farmers should be different? Questions arise over the traceability of taxpayer-funded European subsidies, with some wealthy landowners able to draw millions in support in each year whilst producing minor agricultural or environmental services, such as entrepreneur James Dyson who has claimed over five million in EU subsidies since 2016 (Ungoed-Thomas and Calver, 2019). Notably, the subsidy scenario has favoured those farmers who have inherited large parcels of land and

created a challenging scenario for tenant farmers, who face inflated rent prices (Defra, 2018).

Whilst the CAP's goal is to provide safe and sustainable food for all participating nations; there are concerns over the increasing bureaucracy and regulation associated with EU level policymaking (Farming UK, 2020). A key driver for voting for Brexit for many [farmers] was a perception that bureaucracy would be reduced, and the global competitiveness of UK agriculture would be increased: the creation of a DAP might be an opportunity to achieve these 'goals' (Olivas-Osuna et al., 2019). However, some have been critical of farmers' decisions to vote for Brexit and remove subsidy payments, labelling them as 'turkeys voting for Christmas' (Read, 2019).

Other criticisms of CAP are its contributions to food over-production, contributing to food waste and, although beginning to show more of an environmental focus through various reforms, not doing enough to support ecological initiatives (Defra, 2018). Finally, the CAP receives an unequal distribution of EU funding, the CAP is the single most significant expenditure of the EU, yet it goes to only 3% of Europe's population (Monbiot, 2018). Indeed, many are hopeful that the UK DAP aims to build upon the criticisms of the CAP (Downing and Coe, 2018).

### 2.3 Domestic Agricultural Policy

Since writing this thesis, this contextual chapter has been the product of several rewritings due to policy-related changes. On the 23rd of June 2016, the UK government held a referendum to ask the British population whether they should continue being a member of the EU, resulting in a 52% majority to leave the economic union (Phipps, 2016). Article 50<sup>5</sup> was triggered, starting the official EU exit process.

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<sup>5</sup> Article 50- The official 'Brexit' leaving process. A legal mechanism for allowing a member state to withdraw membership from the European Union.

Now that the UK has left, the transition period has ended, with the current prime minister Boris Johnson signing a trade deal with the EU.

UK policymakers are currently devising a DAP set to replace the EU's CAP. One which moves away from subsidy support mechanisms associated with direct payments and rewards farmers for producing environmental services based around 'public money for public goods' set out in the Agriculture Act (2020) (Gov.uk, 2020). However, subsidy payments are to be removed gradually over the next seven years to 2028. The full details around these new policy measures and their implications to the rural economies are uncertain.

ELMs are set to replace existing subsidy support mechanisms and existing agri-environmental schemes, such as the Countryside Stewardship (Gov.uk, 2021). It is not yet clear how these schemes will work, nor has a public good even been defined. Defra has conducted various 'test and trial' schemes on multiple farms to see how the scheme may work in practice, aiming to have 82,500 farmers enrolled on the ELMs by 2028 (Harris, 2020). Approximately 85, 000 UK farmers claim BPS, suggesting the government want a high uptake of the scheme. BPS reductions begin this year, with farmers receiving 50% reductions by 2024 and 100% by 2028. The Sustainable Farming Incentive, amongst other schemes, are available from 2022 to ease the transition. However, it is unclear exactly how funding will be allocated following the removal of subsidies and in the transition towards ELMs.

Additionally, the pandemic has resulted in less of a focus on food and agricultural policy discussions post-Brexit. In this changing context, including not only multiple policy transitions but also a global pandemic, this thesis reports on the lived experiences of English upland farmers.

## 2.4 Overview: Upland Farming

The following sub-sections now introduce the specific rural agriculture context of this research: upland farming. Then an overview of the challenges facing [upland] farmers reported in the media through a PESTLE analysis is presented. Media sources and research from agricultural industry stakeholders are primarily used for this analysis, as little exists on the challenges facing farmers in the academic literature. Moreover, academic articles specifically are analysed in the subsequent literature review chapters (chapter three). This overview aims to provide further relevant background information around the thesis topic, understanding the significance of upland farmers' challenges. The PESTLE analysis provides a basic overview of some of the challenges facing farmers. However, it does not illustrate the actual realities facing farmers as is reported within this thesis.

### 2.4.1 Upland Farming

Uplands, as opposed to lowlands, are classified as the most severely disadvantaged areas of the UK in terms of land management (Franks et al., 2020). Those individuals who farm these areas are referred to as upland farmers. These areas are home to beautiful landscapes featuring mountains, valleys and moorlands across England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, including: the Yorkshire Dales, the Scottish Highlands, and Snowdonia national park (RSPB, 2013). However, factors such as weather, rural infrastructure, and increasing isolation often make them challenging areas for individuals to reside. Figure 2.4.1 illustrates upland areas in the UK, with upland areas in England being the geographical scope for this thesis. The dark green parts of the figure highlight the predominately lowland UK regions, whilst the other colours highlight the upland areas.

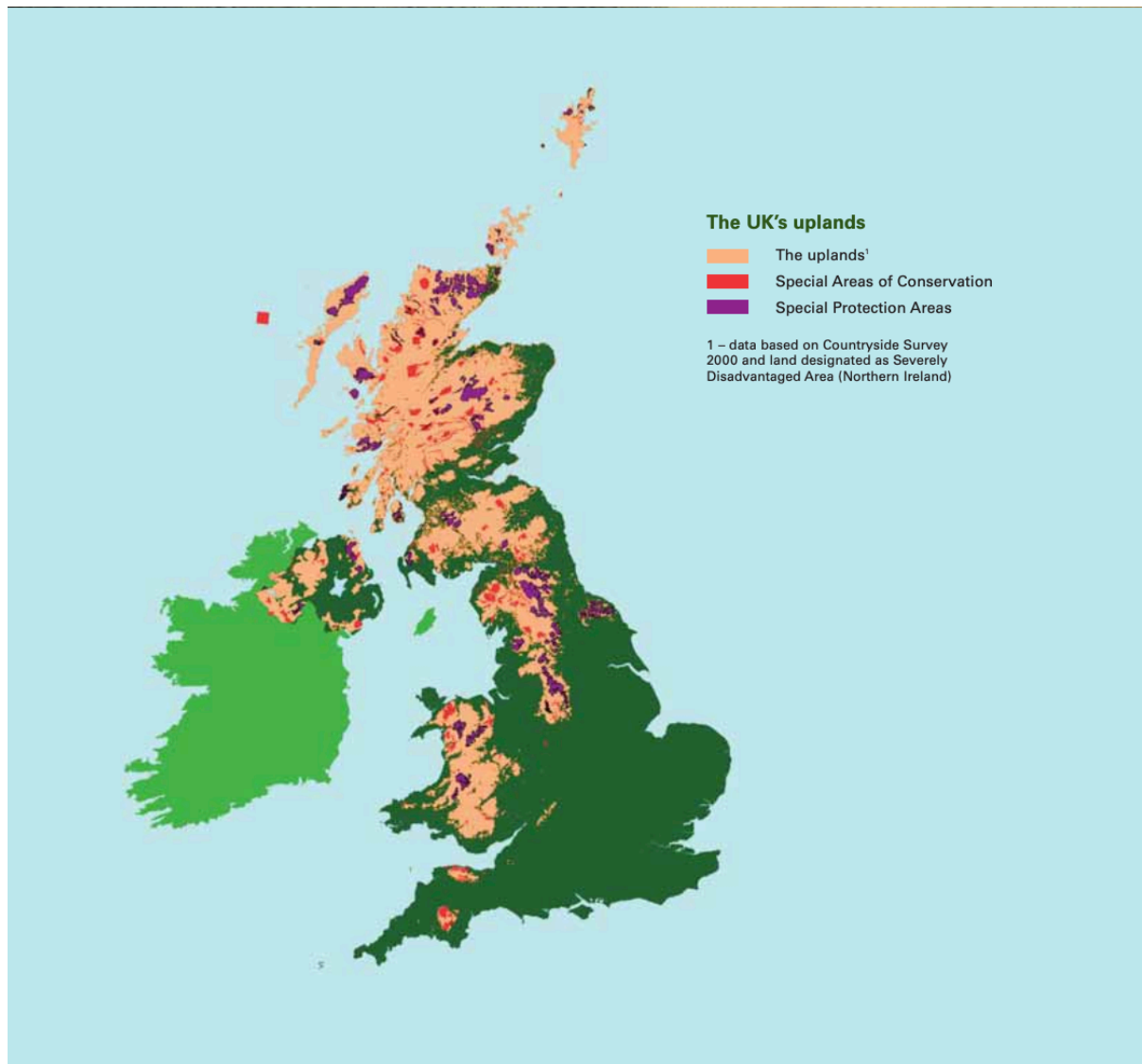


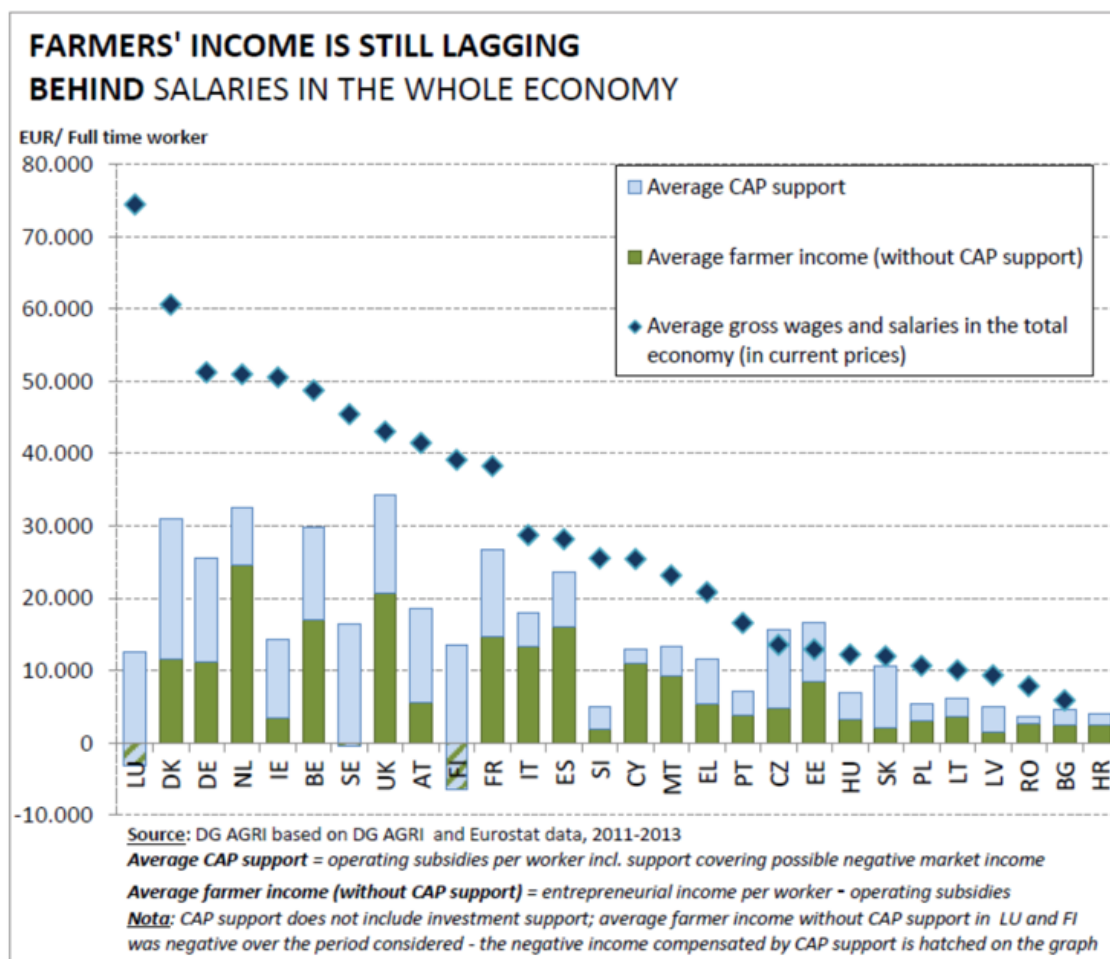
Figure 2.4.1 UK Upland Areas (RSPB, 2013:8)

Beef and sheep livestock farming is common in upland areas, with many farmers rearing ‘hard’ commercial breeds known for living in harsh conditions, such as highland cattle and Swaledale sheep (AHDB, 2009). Upland farmers contribute significantly to the rural economy, rearing quality livestock for food production and delivering valuable public goods, such as providing safe public access to the countryside, encouraging wildlife and fauna and maintaining landscapes (NFU, 2019). Alongside supporting rural economies, upland farmers underpin many other industries, whereby animal by-products are used to make high-quality leather materials in fashionwear, automotive, medicine and aerospace (Brack et al., 2016).

This inter-connectivity suggests that agricultural and rural policy changes may impact farmers and all those inter-related supply chains that rely upon agricultural commodities. A PESTLE analysis is now conducted to present an overview of some of the challenges present in the sector.

## 2.4.2 Political and Economic

The transition away from European subsidy support to ELMs potentially could be disastrous for some farmers. Economically speaking, farming income is less than comparable to wages in other sectors. This income variation between farmer (rural) and urban salaries is noted across EU countries (Figure 2.4.2).



2.4.2 Rural-Urban Wages Source (Matthews, 2021b)

Farm Business Income<sup>6</sup> (FBI) encompasses the total income of the farming enterprise, incorporating subsidies, diversified activities, agricultural output and environmental schemes. In 2018, upland farmers (LFA Grazing Livestock) received an average of £15,500 per annum, a negligible amount of nearly £15,000 below the median earning in the UK (Defra, 2019; Statista, 2021). Farmers in other agricultural sub-sectors, such as poultry, dairy and general cropping can make significantly more.

**Figure 3: Farm Business Income <sup>(a)</sup> by Cost Centre <sup>(b)</sup> 2018/19**

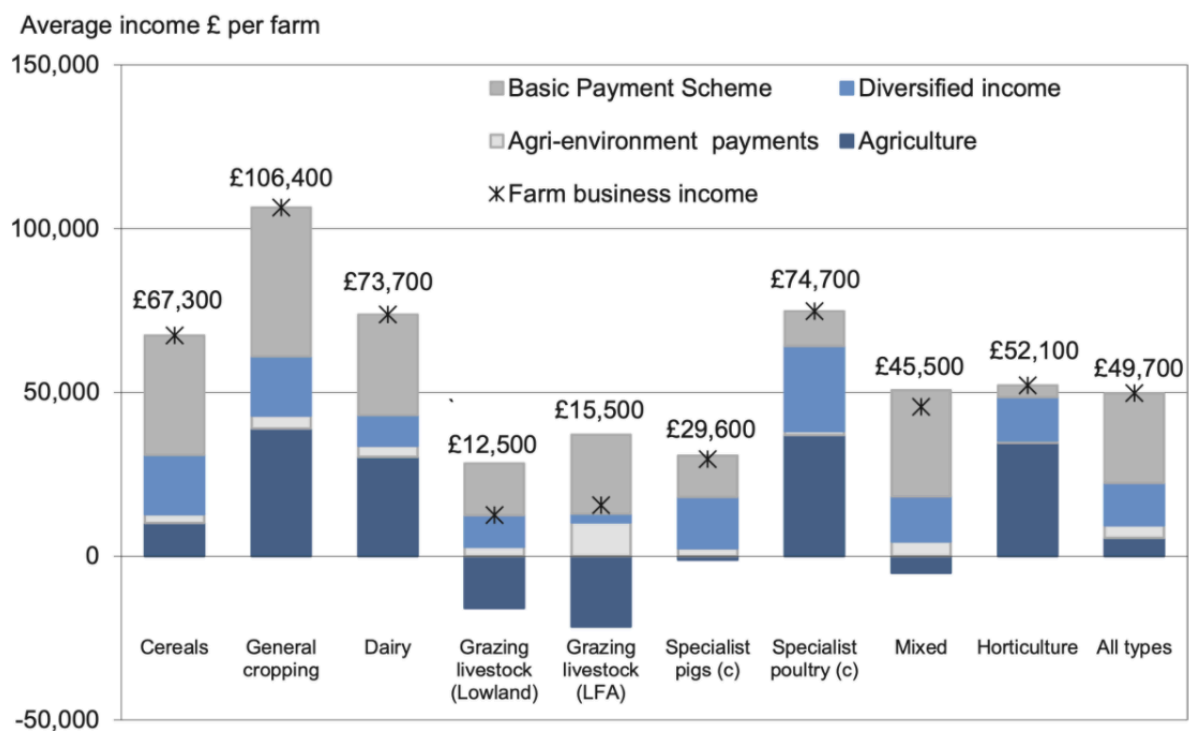


Figure 2.4.2.1 Farm Business Income

<sup>6</sup> FBI= Total output from agriculture (includes crop and livestock valuation change) plus  
Total output from agri-environment schemes plus  
Total output from diversification plus  
Single payment scheme less  
Expenditure (costs, overheads, fuel, repairs, rent, depreciation, paid labour) plus  
Profit/(loss) on sale of fixed assets (AHDB, 2019).



The figures above provide some insight into the profitability challenges facing farmers, showing the CAP subsidies and agri-environmental schemes form a significant part of a farmer's FBI, with on average LFA (upland) farmers making a net loss on agricultural activities. It highlights how financially unsustainable hill farming in England is without European subsidy support. This economic volatility suggests that the transition away from subsidy support must be smooth and effective. Rickard (2019) modelled that in the event of a no-deal Brexit scenario, over 50% of UK farms would have become economically unviable, reflecting the precarity and risk of business failure facing many farmers more generally.

There are also economic concerns impacting farmers across Europe, with the total number of farm holdings declining by approximately four million between 2005 and 2015 (Matthews, 2019). Indeed, that's around 1.2 million farming enterprises stopping trading over three years (the duration of this thesis). Yet, on average, the number of farms over 100ha in size increased by 22% (Matthews, 2019), suggesting that while generally, the number of EU farms are in decline, farms are getting bigger by size. Profitability is a concern in reducing the number of farms across Europe, with those larger farms aiming to maintain business income by drawing larger European subsidy payments while also being able to reach economies of scale. However, there are social implications around the decline of the small family hill farm, as shown in the Findings chapter of this thesis (chapter nine).

#### 2.4.3 Social Challenges

Beyond the economic and political challenges, there are many social challenges associated with upland farming. One is mental health: many farmers work in incredibly socially isolated roles, which can negatively affect mental health. On average, one farmer per week commits suicide due to intense workloads and social pressures, with farming being the UK's 'deadliest industry' (Swire, 2018; Lowther,

2019). The daily stresses involved in being a farmer and the increasing pressures from animal and environmental activist groups exacerbate this situation.

In addition, the farming sector has an ageing population, with the average farm holder aged 59, with only 3% of the industry being under the age of 35 (DEFRA, 2019) This has several implications for agricultural policymakers when encouraging farmers to develop business skill sets to increase productivity and engage in entrepreneurship. Defra is incentivising older farmers to leave the sector to encourage new [entrepreneurial] entrants (DEFRA, 2021). However, it remains to be seen if new entrants will come, given the sector's immense economic, social, and environmental challenges.

Farm succession is arguably contributing to many of the social challenges, with many farmers not taking complete ownership of the farm business until much later in life. The majority of [upland] farms in the UK are family owned, often individuals inherit the family farm through the farm succession process. Indeed, succession is a complicated phenomenon and can cause conflict amongst the farm family and be a contributor towards poor mental health (Jenkins, 2022). The most basic and general definitions of entrepreneurship refer to the process of 'setting up a business and taking on financial risk in hope of acquiring profit', yet the succession process removes the element of farm children having to bear the risk of starting a [farm] enterprise, raising the question of whether farmers can be considered entrepreneurs. Succession is a prominent topic discussed later in the thesis in the context of constrained farm entrepreneurship (section 7.4.3).

#### 2.4.4 Technology

The adoption and integration of technology within business and management practices are becoming increasingly important, adoption of industry 4.0 technologies shows the ever-increasing role technology has in food production and farming practices (Adenaeuer and Banerjee, 2014; Al-Chalabi, 2015; Jayaraman et al., 2016; Wolfert et al., 2017). The rise of vertical farming (Gittins and Morland, 2021), autonomous machinery and drone technology underpinned by artificial intelligence, big data and neural networks means farmers can increase profitability and efficiencies in their farming enterprises, simultaneously tackling the social and environmental challenges (Adenaeuer and Banerjee, 2014). However, factors around topography, age of farm holder, suitability to farm infrastructure means that technology adoption by upland farmers is often limited (Morris et al., 2017). There are fears of the digital revolution bypassing upland farmers, with the farming sector faces tremendous challenges in sector-wide adoption of technology (Bowen and Morris, 2019). This lack of adoption has implications for farmers running successful businesses, as successful farm entrepreneurs often utilise farm innovation and technology to meet their business aims (Gittins et al., 2020).

#### 2.4.5 Legal

Farmers are business owners and must comply with various bodies at the macro (i.e., Health and Safety Executive, Rural Payments Agency, Defra and Natural England) and micro-level (i.e., local planning authorities). Disease outbreaks and compliance with agri-environmental schemes means farmers have been faced with increasing regulation and administrative duties. Farmers must be knowledgeable in all the legal aspects around their farming businesses, which extends to an awareness of the legal considerations around diversifying the farm business. Moreover, rural crime is also prominent in the farming sector, with a year-on-year increase, costing the UK

economy almost £60 billion in 2018 (NFU, 2019). Brexit's economic and social challenges may be a precursor for more illegal and informal activities within the countryside, with some farmers turning to informal activities (Smith et al., 2017). Indeed, farmers must adapt their enterprises to legislative changes that, most recently, include the shift from CAP to DAP centred around environmental sustainability.

#### 2.4.6 Environmental

The UK government established a 25-year strategy to improve the environment, enhance air and water quality, promote biodiversity, combat environmental risks to the public, and attempt to utilise resources more sustainably (Gov.uk, 2019). Farmers have a role in this policy ambition by increasing sustainable intensification practices and promoting biodiversity whilst improving the environment. The NFU (2019) support these ecological initiatives, suggesting that UK agriculture can meet the set environmental targets by 2040, 10 years before the government's target. However, there are still challenges in engaging farmers in sustainable farming practices. Recent rounds of the government's Countryside Stewardship scheme have proven to be disastrous in the delays in paying farmers for their services. Some farmers were delayed a substantial part of their income for almost three years (Dean, 2019). The role of the upland farming, in particular livestock management practices, remains uncertain in the grand scheme of government and global environmental initiatives (Orr et al., 2008).

### 2.4.7 PESTLE Implications

<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Political</b></p> <p>Brexit</p> <p>CAP-DAP</p> <p>Trade</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Economic</b></p> <p>Farm income</p> <p>Profitability</p> <p>Subsidies</p>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Social</b></p> <p>Mental health</p> <p>Rural Isolation</p> <p>Age of farm holder</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Technological</b></p> <p>Farm technology adoption</p> <p>Farmer skillsets</p> <p>Impact to farm labour</p>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Legal</b></p> <p>Legislative changes</p> <p>Increasing bureaucracy</p> <p>Rural crime</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Environmental</b></p> <p>Environmental Land Management</p> <p>Climate change</p> <p>Farmer knowledge</p>

Table 2.4.7 PESTLE Framework

This PESTLE discussion possesses several implications for this thesis. Table 2.4.7 above summarises some of the key discussions from the PESTLE analysis, but by no means is this an exhaustive list. First, this analysis provides an overview of some, though not all, of the current issues facing farmers. As this thesis explores the constraints facing English upland farmers, it has been useful in identifying some challenges that have gathered media interest. However, the PESTLE analysis shows how a ‘typical’ analysis of the external and adverse market conditions facing farmers does not demonstrate the complexity of the realities facing farmers. The primary data collected throughout this research moves beyond this descriptive level of analysis. Second, it summarises vital policy discussions and macroeconomic concerns which may be unknown to the reader. Finally, it forms a starting point for me to begin

thinking about the types of challenges farmers might face throughout this work, understanding the relevance of these constraints to entrepreneurial activity in upland farm businesses.

#### 2.4.8 Emergent Challenges

While operating within this challenging industry of changing policies, economic uncertainty, and rampant social problems, farmers have had to respond to the ongoing challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic. The phasing out of European subsidy support and a transition towards payments under the Environmental Land Management Schemes (ELMs), alongside the increasing social and environmental pressures, creates a challenging institutional scenario for rural actors. The COVID-19 pandemic has added further complexities to an already challenging industry. Farming is an industry that requires its actors to be agile. Prior events (discussed within the historical timeline) demonstrate how farmers must be adaptive to adverse market conditions. The FMD epidemic, BSE outbreak, and the Horse Meat scandal illustrate how farmers must operate under regulations imposed.

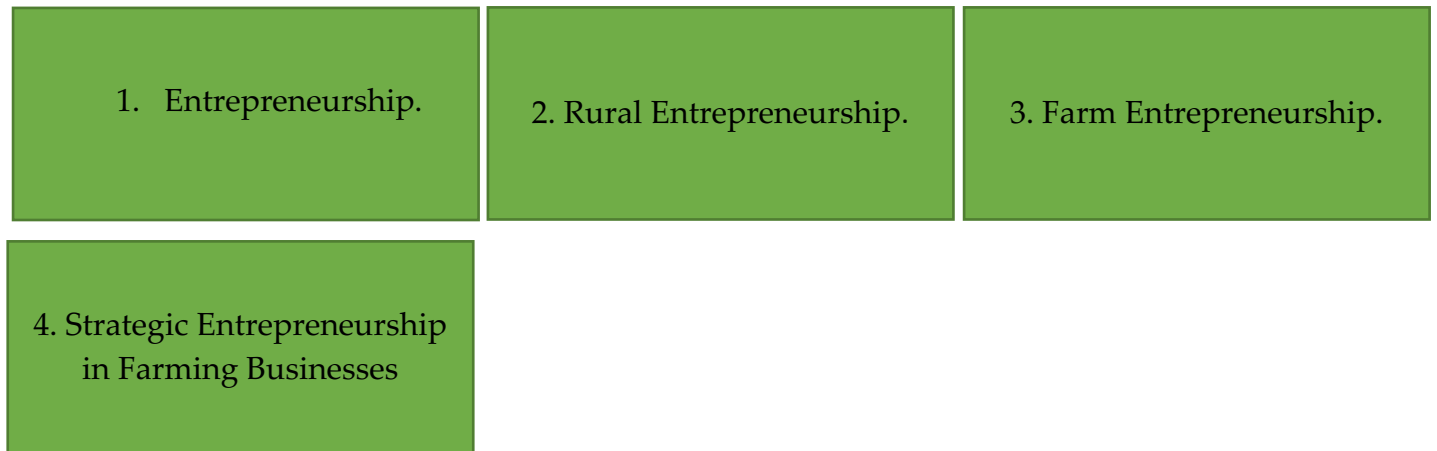
Some reports illustrate how COVID-19 has impacted the food and farming sectors. Harvey (2021) discusses some economic impacts influenced by the pandemic, with farmers on average seeing annual business incomes falling by around 20% from the previous year. Cook (2020) notes how the closure of certain markets has led to increasing food waste, with approximately 3.7 million gallons of milk being destroyed in April 2020. The UK agricultural sector relies heavily on seasonal workforces, such as sheep shearers from New Zealand and fruit pickers from European countries; due to restrictions on travel, many of these roles were left unfulfilled (Morris and O'Carroll, 2020). These are just some of the challenges facing farmers which have arisen during the coronavirus pandemic. However, this thesis explores these

challenges from the farmer's viewpoint, investigating the nature of [covid] challenges and understanding how farmers have devised [entrepreneurial] strategies to respond to these emergent challenges.

## 2.5 Chapter Summary

This chapter has introduced some essential background information around the challenges facing farmers. It began with a historical analysis of farmers' challenges, which have helped shape current agricultural policies and practices today. Then the specific context of this thesis was positioned, discussing how this research is being conducted at a pivotal time. The EU's CAP and its criticisms were discussed before presenting some of the sectoral challenges highlighted by the media. The next chapter reviews literature related to the thesis topic: exploring the lived realities facing English upland farmers.

## Chapter Three: Literature Review



### 3.0 Introduction

This chapter is a literature review that offers a comprehensive and critical analysis of relevant studies relating to the research topic i.e., an exploration into the realities facing upland beef and sheep farmers in the UK. A narrative style review (Jesson et al., 2011) is conducted that allows a broad range of topics within the boundaries of entrepreneurship and strategic management research in agricultural/rural contexts to be reviewed. This thesis also contributes in an interdisciplinary fashion to other areas of literature such as general business and management agriculture, rural geography/studies and sociological research figure 3.0 below). This review aims to analyse work relating to the thesis topic, assess the robustness of methods and theories used, identify research gaps, and generate new insights about how approaches to entrepreneurship and strategic management manifest in upland farming business enterprises. Research questions, concepts and themes emerge throughout this review which are further explored in the data collection phase of the thesis.

The literature review is separated into four sections: Entrepreneurship (Section 3.1); Rural Entrepreneurship (Section 3.2); Farm Entrepreneurship (Section 3.3); Strategic



Entrepreneurship in Farm Businesses (Section 4.4). This structure allows relevant studies which link to the thesis topic to be analysed, understanding what research already exists and identify where a contribution to the literature can be made.

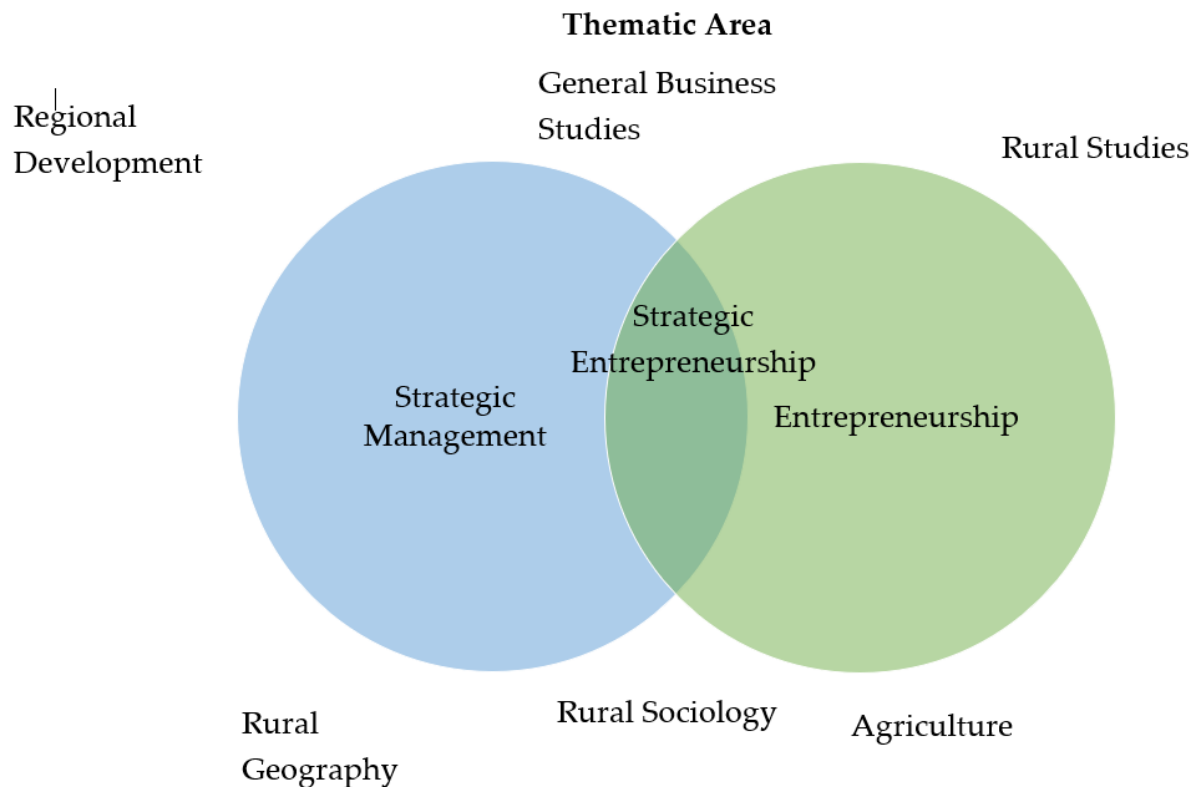


Figure 3.0 Areas of Literature Reviewed

This chapter is structured as follows. Section one explores the entrepreneurship literature, constructing a definition of entrepreneurship by analysing key contributors' work to the field. Various concepts and themes are identified, which are later used to conceptualise 'upland farmers as entrepreneurs'. Section two focuses on rural entrepreneurship, a critical area to which this body of work contributes to, conceptualising the constructs of 'rural' and 'rurality', and paying particular attention to the rural as a context in entrepreneurship research. This section introduces two concepts, 'constrained entrepreneurship' (de Bruin and Dupuis, 2000) and 'Spatial Context' (Muller and Korsgaard, 2018), which is later applied to understand how entrepreneurship manifests in upland farm businesses. Section three shifts focus

slightly by investigating relevant research in the area of *farm* entrepreneurship, beginning with an analysis of Fitz-Koch's et al. (2018) literature review who outlines future directions of the field. Topics around Entrepreneurial Identity (EI), Family Entrepreneurship (FE) and Institutional Entrepreneurship (IE) are identified as areas which could be further theoretically developed. These areas subsequently form a valuable part of the findings and discussions chapters and are used to conceptualise the challenges facing upland farmers. In section four, relevant concepts and themes from the strategic management discipline are analysed in relation to farming businesses. Strategic Thinking Capabilities (STC) (Heracleous, 1998a; Liedtka, 1998), Farm Management Decision Making (FMDM) (Farmer-Bowers, 2010), business strategies and farm competitiveness are among some of the concepts and themes discussed. Figure 3.1 below summarises the structure and dominant theories, themes and concepts which have emerged throughout the review. The purpose of the separation into these constituent sections is to identify concepts, theories and debates within the fields of entrepreneurship and strategic management (i.e., Strategic Entrepreneurship) to understand the types of [entrepreneurial] farm business strategies farmers are using to respond to the realities in the sector.

Structure	Purpose	Emergent Themes
1. Entrepreneurship	Broad definition of entrepreneurship incorporating both behavioural and trait-based	Define entrepreneurship and identify relevant theories, themes, and concepts to conceptualise farmers as
2. Rural Entrepreneurship	Review the wider fields of research this thesis contributes to	Constrained entrepreneurship, spatial context, defining rural, rural enterprise and entrepreneurs
3. Farm Entrepreneurship	To identify what an entrepreneurial farmer is and identify areas for further study	Entrepreneurial identity, Family Entrepreneurship, Institutional Entrepreneurship.
4 Strategic Entrepreneurship in Farming Businesses	To explore papers looking at 'strategic entrepreneurship' in farming businesses	Farm business strategies, strategic thinking capabilities, farmers as strategists.

Figure 3.1 Summary of Emerging Concepts (Author Generated)

### 3.1 Entrepreneurship

This section aims to establish a definition of entrepreneurship which I am content with using. This is achieved by exploring definitions and critical debates provided by entrepreneurship scholars. Entrepreneurship theories, such as behavioural and trait-based approaches to entrepreneurship, are analysed before arguing that a broader definition of entrepreneurship needs to be used to analyse the entrepreneurial nature of farmers and the farm enterprises they create. This is done to determine the extent upland farmers utilise entrepreneurial activities to respond to the realities in the sector.

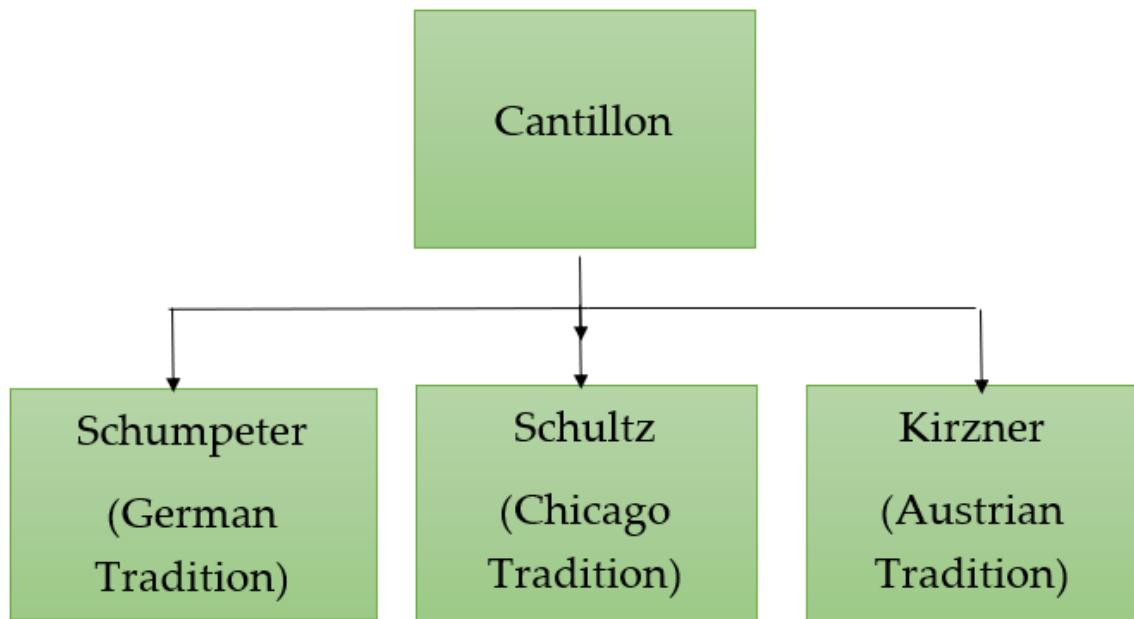


Figure 3.1 Key Contributors to Entrepreneurship Research (Hebert & Link, 1989:41)

Consequently, defining entrepreneurship and an entrepreneur is complex as no universal definition exists (Kao, 1993). Hebert and Link (1989) cite Richard Cantillon in 1730 as being one of the key contributors to creating the entrepreneurship field. While entrepreneurs have probably always existed in some form or another, Cantillon is often regarded as one of the first to use the term ‘entrepreneur’, defining one as any person who purchased and resold goods for uncertain prices (Thornton, 2019). Cantillon’s conceptualisation of an entrepreneur is often referenced alongside other leading entrepreneurship scholars, including Joseph Schumpeter, Alfred Schultz and Israel Kirzner, who are now discussed (Figure 3.1) (Hebert & Link, 1989).

Innovation and entrepreneurship are often closely related and associated with the seminal work of Schumpeter et al. (1934), who argued that entrepreneurs could be considered agents of economic change, utilising innovation as a mechanism to create

new products and services, recognising and exploiting market opportunities through venture creation and disrupting the norms of the market (Pato and Teixeira, 2016). Schumpeter (1934) coins the term 'creative destruction' to signify entrepreneurs' creating new products and services whilst simultaneously 'destroying' obsolete products, services, practices, and processes (Reinert and Reinert, 2006). Schultz regards entrepreneurs as 'those individuals who respond to the opportunities for creating new products that arise because of technical breakthroughs' (Schmitz & Holmes, 1990:99). Kirzner suggests entrepreneurship is a process of discovery, suggesting entrepreneurs must remain 'alert' to new market opportunities that can be exploited for profit (McMullen and Shepherd, 2006; Alvarez and Barney, 2007).

The work by the scholars mentioned above has important considerations for contemporary scholars, with their theories and ideas being used as theoretical underpinnings to analyse entrepreneurship phenomena (Spencer et al., 2008; Roundy et al., 2018). Despite rapid growth in entrepreneurship research from 1990 to the present day (Chandra, 2018), the term 'entrepreneurship' is defined in multiple ways, suggesting complexity in understanding the phenomena. One possible way to understand entrepreneurship is by asking the question, who is an entrepreneur? On a philosophical level, asking this question allows us to conceptualise entrepreneurs in a humanistic manner, exploring characteristics around human behaviour and traits. The entrepreneurial characteristics cited in the literature are now identified, which are later used to assess the extent to which upland farmers can be considered entrepreneurs.

### 3.1.1 Who is an entrepreneur? Is it still a question worth asking?

Gartner (1988) in his seminal paper states asking 'who is an entrepreneur?' is the wrong question', suggesting that a behavioural approach to entrepreneurship (i.e.,

focusing on what entrepreneurs create), provides a greater understanding of entrepreneurship than a trait-based approach ever could (i.e., understanding the characteristics of an entrepreneur). Gartner (1988:64) uses an analogy of dancing to explore the phenomena:

‘How do we know the dancer from the dance? When we view entrepreneurship from a behavioural perspective we do not artificially separate dancer from dance, we do not attempt to fashion a reassuring simplicity. The behavioural approach challenges us to develop research questions, methodologies ‘and techniques that will do justice to the complexity of entrepreneurship.’

A behavioural approach to entrepreneurship focuses on ‘what the entrepreneur does, not what the entrepreneur is’ (Gartner, 1988: 57). This approach adopts a process view, moving away from the characteristics associated with being an [successful] entrepreneur, but looking at the activities and processes involved in new venture creation. However, Gartner’s (1988) behavioural approach has been criticised, Carland et al. (1988) suggest a trait-based approach to entrepreneurship and exploring the question of ‘who is an entrepreneur’ ‘is a question worth asking’, arguing behavioural approaches to entrepreneurship have offered little clarity into understanding the phenomena. Carland et al. (1988) call for a broader definition of entrepreneurship, encompassing both behavioural and trait-based approaches. Shane and Venkataraman's (2000) definition is more general, synthesising both a trait-based and behavioural approach to conceptualise entrepreneurship, suggesting entrepreneurship consists of two parts:

- The presence of lucrative opportunities.
- The presence of enterprising individuals.

Shane and Venkataraman's (2000) argument is that analysing one (i.e. behaviour or trait-based) approach without the other may lead to inconsistencies in understanding entrepreneurship phenomena. For example, focusing on individuals alone ignores the enterprise entrepreneurs create, whereas concentrating on lucrative opportunities ignores an entrepreneur's trait-based characteristics. This debate by Shane and Venkataraman (2000) influences this study, looking at entrepreneurship through both behavioural and trait-based approaches. A trait-based approach is used to understand entrepreneurial, or non-entrepreneurial, characteristics of upland farmers (i.e. presence of enterprising individuals), whilst a behavioural approach is used to analyse new venture creations connected to the farm business (i.e. presence of lucrative opportunities). Having a broader definition of entrepreneurship that incorporates behavioural and trait-based approaches allows me to investigate the complicated world of entrepreneurial farming. Entrepreneurial characteristics are now explored in greater depth.

### 3.1.2 Entrepreneurial characteristics

A 'characteristic' refers to a notable quality associated with something or someone. In terms of entrepreneurship, it could be an inbuilt quality, a character trait or a learned skill (Sahut and Peris-Ortiz, 2014). Many characteristics are associated with both successful and unsuccessful entrepreneurs in the literature (Littunen, 2000).

One of the most cited concepts relating to the traits of entrepreneurs is Entrepreneurial Orientation (EO). An individual is deemed to be entrepreneurially orientated if they possess these three characteristics: innovativeness, risk-taking and proactiveness (Miller, 1983). Innovativeness can be linked to Schumpeterian economics, referring to how an entrepreneur can change and create new products and services, implementing new methods of doing business whilst changing existing practices (Lumpkin and Dess, 1996). Individuals who engage in risk-taking, linking to Cantillon, behaviours

for greater rewards are considered EO in nature (Covin and Slevin, 1989). Entrepreneurs typically risk their finances and reputations to pursue business ventures in pursuit of profit. Finally, proactiveness relates to an entrepreneurs' ability to realise opportunities (i.e. opportunity recognition) unrelated to present activities (Venkatraman and Ramanujam, 1986), which links to Kirzner's (1979) notion of 'entrepreneurial alertness'. Successful entrepreneurs can generate profit by capitalising on often unseen and overlooked opportunities. Smith et al. (2020) argue that EO is an important concept which influences the strategy-making process within an enterprise, making it a suitable concept for this study on entrepreneurship and strategic management in farm businesses. However, it is crucial to consider that entrepreneurship extends beyond the concept of EO, and entrepreneurship scholars should examine other characteristics associated with entrepreneurial behaviour.

Other characteristics of entrepreneurial behaviour found include Locus of Control (LoC), need for achievement (N-ach), motivation and resilience (Hansemark, 2003; Segal et al., 2005; Baldegger et al., 2017; Korber and Mcnaughton, 2018). The concept of Locus of Control (LoC) refers to the ability an individual has to exercise control over one's life (Prakash et al., 2015). Entrepreneurs are said to possess an internal LoC, whereby constraints can be overcome via determination and an entrepreneurial mindset. Whilst those not EO are said to have an external LoC, whereby actors believe they have limited control over their lives. However, the concept of LoC should not be taken literally, and it may be considered narcissistic and wrong to assume all constraints can be overcome through adjusting mindsets. As argued later in the thesis, it is shown that some entrepreneurial attitudes cannot overcome *all* constraints (see chapter nine, section 8.3.2).

Other notable characteristics to consider are resilience and motivation. Resilience refers to the ability of individuals to respond and overcome the challenges facing them (Corner et al., 2017). It is important because successful entrepreneurship often entails



a path of business failure (Singh et al., 2007). Moreover, many entrepreneurs seem to possess high levels of motivation and a N-ach in life, some motivated by non-economic goals and social entrepreneurship objectives (Dacin et al., 2010).

Exploring 'who an entrepreneur is' and asking 'what an entrepreneur does' appears to be useful in meeting the research aim. Looking at both entrepreneurship as a process (i.e., behavioural approach) and understanding entrepreneurial characteristics (i.e., trait-based approach) provided me with theoretical guiding to later conceptualise upland farmers as entrepreneurs.

### 3.1.3 Entrepreneurship summary

This section has provided insight into how entrepreneurship is viewed in this study. It is not confined to looking at entrepreneurship through one specific lens. Instead, a broader definition of entrepreneurship underpins this research, looking at both the characteristics associated with being entrepreneurial alongside the processes and practices used to create and run farm enterprises. This broader approach allows the multiple units of analysis related to farm entrepreneurship to be explored. The following sub-section contextualises this review further, turning attention to the area of rural entrepreneurship research.

## 3.2 Rural Entrepreneurship

In this section, a brief overview of the area of 'rural entrepreneurship' is introduced. The 'rural' is then conceptualised in relation to the rural-urban classification framework and discussed regarding the so-called 'rural-urban divide' (Tacoli, 1998) before discussing the notion of a 'rural entrepreneur'. This sub-section aims to attempt to understand rural entrepreneurship in comparison to mainstream entrepreneurship,

alongside identify relevant concepts, theories, and themes that can be used in this thesis to help meet the research aim.

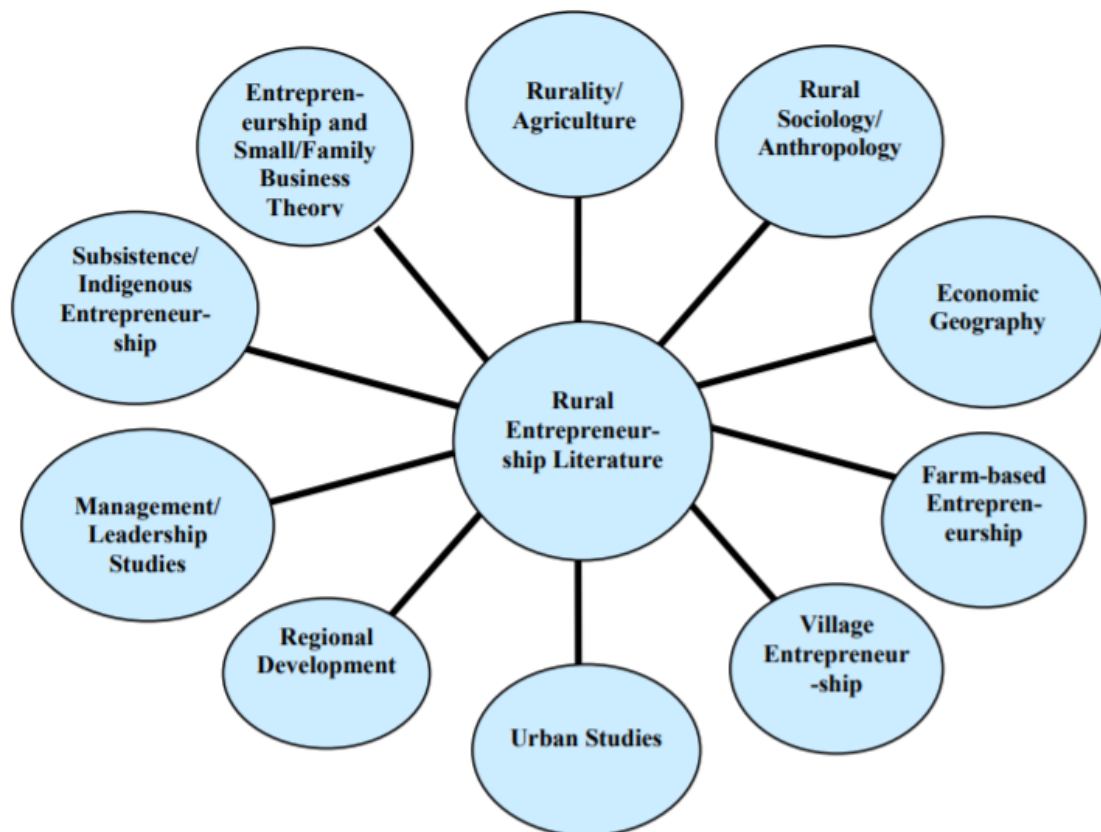


Figure 3.2 Common Themes in Rural Enterprise Research (McElwee and Smith, 2014: 437)

Rural entrepreneurship literature is of growing interest yet still receives considerably less scholarly attention than its urban counterpart (Pato and Teixeira, 2016). This presents challenges for investigating phenomena within a rural context, as the challenges are different and not as well noted as within an urban setting (McElwee and Atherton, 2011). McElwee and Smith (2014) illustrate in Figure 3.2 above some common themes in rural enterprise literature which have received some academic attention. This thesis contributes to several rural entrepreneurship themes, particularly farm-based entrepreneurship, entrepreneurship theory and rural

sociology/agriculture. Before one seeks to analyse farm entrepreneurship, the rural context farmers operate within should first be explored.

### 3.2.1 What is rural?

Theoretically speaking, 'the rural' has been socially and culturally constructed in various ways within academic literature (Mingay, 2017). The 'rural' is often symbolised as an idyllic space in comparison to urban areas; however, its interpretations can vary widely (Smith et al., 2017). The rural can be defined and theorised differently depending upon one's philosophical and methodological stance, reflecting one's own worldview (Woods, 2011). For functionalist scholars, the rural can be theorised as existing out there, being definable and measurable through certain measures i.e. demographics, geographical/topographical make-up (Woods, 2011). However, some characteristics are challenging to prove as being 'intrinsically rural', nor do some characteristics reflect 'the realities of rural life' (Woods, 2011). Indeed, rurality for some can be socially constructed. Rural to one person, for example, might be associated with wealthy landowners enjoying countryside activities (i.e., shooting parties), whilst to another rural might be related to the poverty-stricken areas in less economically developed countries.

As I believe the concepts of rural and rurality can also be socially constructed, arguably rural life and the 'rural idyll' is not something that can be objectively measured, instead it is a form of culture which occurs in rural contexts and thus, should be explored interpretatively. I believe rural environments consist of materialistic components, which can be measured objectively, and immaterial and cultural realities not present in urban environments. These discussions are returned to later in the methodology chapter (Section 6.3), but to gain a deeper understanding into the rural/agricultural context underpinning this thesis, it is useful to compare rural and urban environments.

### 3.2.2 The Rural-Urban Divide

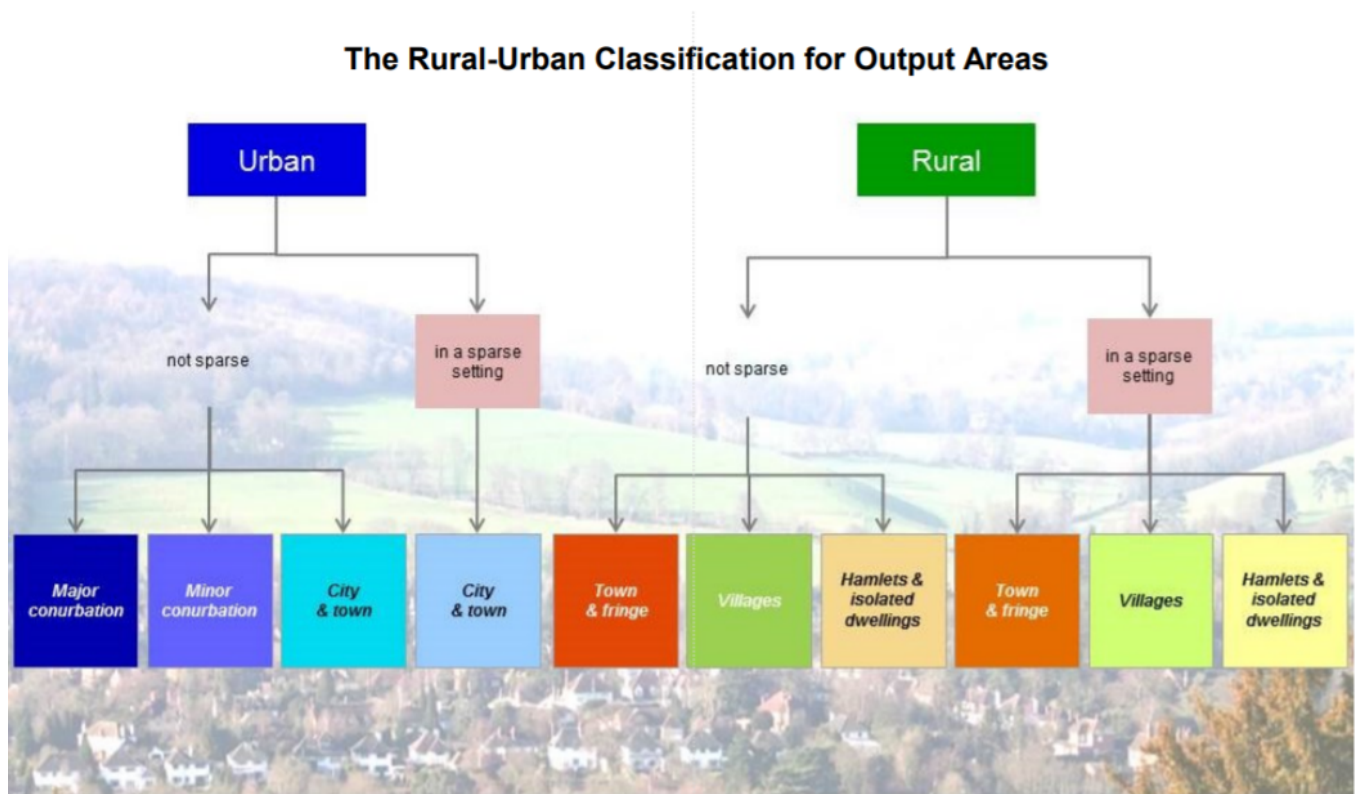


Figure 3.2.2 Rural-Urban Classification (ONS, 2011).

The ‘Rural-Urban Classification’ framework illustrates some differences between rural and urban living. The classification of rural and urban is important for policy, as policies have been set up independently for rural areas (i.e., Rural Development Programme for England). There are some notable differences between rural and urban environments, in the rural and regional studies literature, these differences are often referred to as the rural-urban divide (Tacoli, 1998; Rizov and Walsh, 2011). Scott et al. (2007:4) (table 3.2.2 below) highlights some distinctive characteristics between rural and urban regions:

Dimension	Urban	Rural
1. Economy	Secondary and territory sector dominant	Primary industry and supporting activities dominant

2. Employment	Manufacturing, construction, administration and services.	Agriculture, forestry and other primary industry occupations
3. Education	Higher than national average	Lower than national average
4. Political views	Liberal, typically more left wing	Conservative, typically more right wing and change resistant
5. Ethnicity	Multi-cultured	Typically white

Table 3.2.2 Rural and Urban areas

Looking at these differences between rural and urban areas, it is understandable how divides can occur. Some research suggests a divide; for example, Bowen et al. (2019) highlight how digitalisation in rural economies is a challenge, arguing that the digital revolution bypasses the UK's agricultural sector. Moreover, Lever and Milbourne (2017) highlight a disconnection between urban and rural populations, providing insight into how practices within food and farming supply chains, such as the role of migrant workers, are often invisible to the general (urban) public. However, Scott et al. (2007) challenge policymakers to stereotype between rural and urban areas. Cloke (2006) suggests variation exists in rural economies, classifying rural regions as 'old and new', arguing that some rural areas adapt to urbanisation. Indeed, the rural-urban divide is a phenomenon itself. Dymitrow and Stenseke (2016) suggest rural and urban areas are becoming increasingly blurred, with rural regions subjected to economic, social and visible transitions due to increasing urbanization. Millward et al. (2003) brand rural areas as a 'functional extension of the city' due to increased connectivity through developments in Information Technologies (IT).

The rural-urban framework appears useful in segmenting areas based upon certain demographic and geographic features. However, it does little to help scholars analyse the more subjective components associated with rurality, such as understanding the role of farming cultures and their impact on managing [farm] businesses. Arguably,

the rural-urban classification highlights indifferences rather than explores the relationships between rural and urban regions.

The above indicates several implications for this thesis, including the importance of exploring the concept of the so-called rural-urban divide concerning the realities facing farmers and understanding how [entrepreneurial] farmers interact within and across rural and urban environments. Moreover, there is a need to go beyond a purely objective perspective as outlined in the rural-urban classification framework. Instead, to look at the softer and subjective components that make up the rural vis-a-vis those inhabiting rural areas. In this light, now rural as a context has been introduced, the notion of a rural entrepreneur is now discussed.

### 3.2.3 Rural entrepreneurship or entrepreneurship in the rural?

McElwee and Atherton (2011:282) acknowledge complexity in conceptualising a rural entrepreneur, but attempt a definition:

‘A rural entrepreneur is an individual who uses the resources of the regional economy; geographical, physical, topographical, labour, and so on, in order to gain a competitive advantage by trading in goods and services which ultimately generate social or economic capital for the rural environment in which the rural entrepreneur is located.’

This is a sound definition as the authors express the duality between an entrepreneur and the context in which they operate within, discussing how local resources are used to generate capital for the local rural economy. Furthermore, McElwee and Smith (2014:441) classify a rural enterprise under three characteristics:

- The main location is within a rural setting.
- The enterprise suits a local purpose, employing local people.
- The enterprise activities contribute towards local gross value added.

The above definitions of a rural entrepreneur and rural enterprise are subtly distinctive to an urban enterprise's features, emphasising the time, place, and space in which [rural] entrepreneurs operate within. However, a deeper philosophical question emerges from these definitions, that is does rural entrepreneurship actually exist? Or is it simply entrepreneurship occurring in rural settings?

Korsgaard and Tanvig (2015:5) highlighted this debate, who propose two typologies, 'entrepreneurship in the rural' and 'rural entrepreneurship'. 'Entrepreneurship in the rural' refers to the entrepreneurial activities that occur within a rural setting. If removed from a rural context, entrepreneurs would incur minimal/no financial implications. Whereas 'rural entrepreneurship' and the activities of the rural entrepreneur rely on spatial conditions within a rural environment, with space and place being key to the entrepreneurial activities. Outlined below are two examples to clarify these ideal types.

Entrepreneurship in the rural	Bobby runs a micro-brewery in his home in rural Cumbria, England. He crafts lagers and ales, bottles them himself and distributes them across the UK via a third party delivery service. Bobby ran the same business in London city centre,
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	but after his parents died and bequeathed him their house, he decided to move the business to Cumbria. Bobby has incurred minimal financial loss.
Rural Entrepreneurship	Steve is a farmer from Perth, Scotland, he has diversified from his commercial Limousine suckler beef herd to Italian water buffalo, where he plans to open up Scotland's first buffalo mozzarella factory and serve "buffalo burgers" at local events. He emphasises a strong place-based approach and actively engages with the local community through promoting his local businesses.

Table 3.2.3 Rural Typology Examples (Author Generated)

Pato and Teixeira (2019) sought to explore these two typologies empirically, finding that out of 142 businesses operating in one rural area, only a small proportion could be considered rural entrepreneurs. Instead, a majority of businesses that make up the rural could operate equally in urban environments and are not dependent upon the distinctive features of rural areas—suggesting that rural entrepreneurship should not be ‘framed as a distinctive category of entrepreneurship in its own right’ (McElwee and Smith, 2014: 460).

The ‘entrepreneurship in the rural’ type does not apply itself to farming practices, as farmers and farm businesses cannot wholly be removed from the rural context they operate within. Farmers depend on the distinctive rural features to run their businesses, for example, utilising marginal land areas to produce environmental



services. However, some [entrepreneurial] farmers may seek to utilise resources from both rural and urban areas. The concepts of ‘spatial context’ and ‘constrained entrepreneurship’ are now introduced, incorporating the rural context in which farmers operate.

### 3.2.4 Spatial context and constrained entrepreneurship

Müller and Korsgaard’s (2018) ‘spatial context’ is identified as a useful concept to explore within this research. It incorporates the infrastructural, geographical and topographical components in a rural context, alongside the meanings relating to heritage, culture and locations where entrepreneurial activities are created. The concepts align well with the interpretative/constructionist methodological approach adopted, allowing me to take into consideration both the subjective and objective dimensions of the rural environment upland farmers operate within.

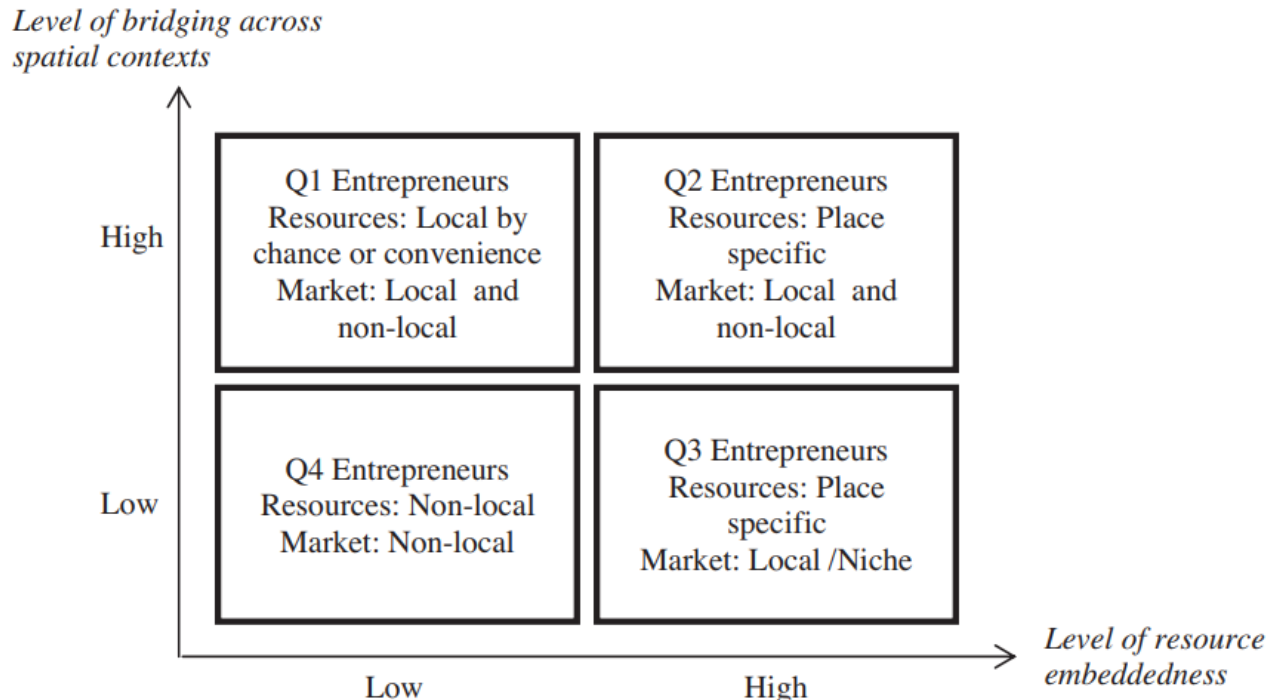


Figure 3.2.4 Typology Framework (Müller and Korsgaard, 2018)

Müller and Korsgaard's (2018) typology framework (figure 3.2.4 above) illustrate how rural entrepreneurs operate across different spatial contexts. The typology matrix comprises two axes of high and low nature: Resource embeddedness refers to the extent to which resources are embedded in the local community and how entrepreneurs bridge across different spatial contexts, such as serving local, non-local or rural-urban markets. Müller's typology framework provides insight into how the role of context and entrepreneurial activity are connected, showing how rural entrepreneurs operate in and across different spatial contexts. However, only a small sample within Müller and Korsgaard's (2018) study explored the spatial context of farm entrepreneurs. The implication here for the thesis is to build on Müller and Korsgaard's work and understand the role of spatial context in upland farm entrepreneurship.

de Bruin and Dupuis's (2003:25) concept 'constrained entrepreneurship' is also identified as relevant to the research aim of exploring the constraints and challenges facing English upland farmers. Constrained entrepreneurship refers to those endogenous and exogenous factors which limit business activities (McElwee, 2006). Constraints can exist at both the macro and micro levels, ranging from institutional constraints, such as responding to agricultural policy change, to micro-level constraints impacting individual farmers, such as issues with running a family business.

'Constrained entrepreneurship' has not been overly applied to studies on rural and farm entrepreneurship. Moreover, de Bruin and Dupuis's (2003) work was more generally explored from an economics perspective. Some studies have implicitly explored the challenges facing farmers, such as Morris et al. (2017) who notes location and planning restriction as constraints when looking at farm diversification opportunities, alongside Falconer (2000) who identified several farm level constraints when looking at participant rates of agricultural environmental schemes. However,

there appears to be a gap in the studies that explicitly explored the constraints and challenges facing upland farmers, nor have they been underpinned with de Bruin and Dupuis's (2003) 'constrained entrepreneurship' concept. This proposes that this concept can be developed by applying it to this study on upland farm entrepreneurship and strategic management.

For policymakers to encourage rural actors to contribute to the economic sustainability of rural communities, it is essential to understand the constraints and challenges preventing entrepreneurial activity. By exploring these constraints and challenges, policymakers can understand the lived experiences of farmers and devise suitable policies at national and regional levels that support rural entrepreneurship activities. Underpinning this thesis with the concepts of 'spatial context' and 'constrained entrepreneurship' allows me to explore and extend these theoretical concepts through an application to an upland farming context.

Following this discussion around spatial context and constrained entrepreneurship, the first research question emerges:

- How might the challenges facing English upland beef and sheep farmers be constraining of entrepreneurial activity?

### 3.2.5 Rural entrepreneurship summary

To summarise, this section has further contextualised this literature review, providing definitions of rural entrepreneurs and rural enterprises. The rural-urban classification framework has been critiqued to show problems associated with classifying rural and urban areas, alongside signifying the rural-urban divide debate. Moreover, current themes within rural enterprise literature have been highlighted, discussing where this thesis contributes to within the broader field of rural entrepreneurship. Furthermore,

several debates from the literature have been highlighted, namely rural entrepreneurship typologies, 'spatial context' and 'constrained entrepreneurship', showing how they will be used in this thesis to investigate the complex phenomenon of farm entrepreneurship within an upland context. Whilst this section has discussed what constitutes a rural entrepreneur, the notion of a farm entrepreneur has yet to be discussed. The following section contextualises the study further, exploring relevant research within the niche field of farm entrepreneurship.

### 3.3 Farmers as Entrepreneurs

This sub-section seeks to review relevant research in the area of farm entrepreneurship. It begins with an analysis of Fitz-Koch's et al. (2017) literature review who proposes three key areas for further research within the farm entrepreneurship field: Entrepreneurial Identity, Institutional Entrepreneurship (IE) and Family Entrepreneurship. This paper is selected as it outlines the future trajectories of the field and allows me to identify areas to which I can contribute throughout my research. Alongside this, research that have sought to conceptualise 'farmers as entrepreneurs' are analysed, attempting to understand what an entrepreneurial farmer is and what the farm entrepreneurship process entails. This is done so I can build upon this and conceptualise 'upland farmers as entrepreneurs'. Finally, this sub-section concludes with a discussion around methodological approaches used within farm entrepreneurship research, arguing why more qualitative research should be used.

### 3.3.1 Areas for Investigation

Several literature reviews have been on farm entrepreneurship in recent years (Alsos and Carter, 2006; McElwee, 2006a; Fitz-Koch et al., 2018; Dias et al., 2019). Fitz-Koch's et al. (2017) literature review is analysed because it provides a 'state of art' of opportunities for further agricultural entrepreneurship research, noting three areas which future agricultural entrepreneurship scholars should focus on, posing some unanswered questions she believes should be explored (Table 3.3.1).

Theme	Questions
1. Entrepreneurial Identity.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How do agricultural entrepreneurs build an entrepreneurial identity?</li> <li>• How and why does entrepreneurial identity impact the entrepreneurial process in the agricultural sector?</li> </ul>
2. Family Entrepreneurship.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How do family, household, and kinship factors influence or become influenced by entrepreneurship in the agricultural sector?</li> <li>• What are the reasons for and results of a family entrepreneurial orientation in agricultural firms?</li> <li>• How does succession impact entrepreneurship in family owned firms in the agricultural sector?</li> </ul>
3. Institutions and Entrepreneurship.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How the interrelationship of institutions in the agricultural sector and their role in the entrepreneurial process be understood?</li> <li>• How do institutional frameworks and institutional change affect the pursuit of business opportunities among agricultural entrepreneurs in</li> </ul>

	<p>countries with evolving institutional frameworks?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How do international, national, regional, and local institutions constrain or facilitate entrepreneurship in agricultural sector?</li> </ul>
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Table 3.3.1: Summary of potential future farm entrepreneurship research (author generated)

The areas highlighted in table 3.3.1 above are applied to the thesis, as answers to these questions can help gain an insight into the realities facing upland farmers. In the following sub-section, relevant literature relating to these headings are discussed, beginning with EI.

### 3.3.2 Entrepreneurial Identity: Farmers as entrepreneurs

The concept of identity is neglected in farm entrepreneurship research (Vesala et al., 2007). It may be argued that farmers possess multiple identities and, depending upon how one analyses them, makes them a phenomenon in their regard.

Some scholars have attempted to typify the multiple identities associated with farmers, such as Saugeres (2002:379), who introduces the ‘good farmer’, who is connected to the land and environmentally conscious of their farming practices. In contrast, ‘bad farmers’ are disconnected from the land and place financial profit and greed above environmental stewardship (Saugeres, 2002). McElwee and Smith (2012) introduce another farmer type, the ‘rogue farmer’ or slightly less criminal ‘informal farmers’, who would automatically be assumed to be ‘bad farmers’. However, whilst rogue farmers may have ‘forgotten his disconnection with the land’ (Saugeres, 2002), informal farmers use a mixture of legal and informal activities (i.e. pay cash in hand wages, obtain unlicensed supplies) when necessary. The typology examples above proved to be a useful theoretical tool to aid Smith and McElwee (2011) in gaining

insight into [informal] entrepreneurship activities and is helpful in illustrating the complex identities associated with farmers.

Indeed, in most cases, farmers are stereotyped as men. Smith and McElwee (2013:113) comment on this male-dominated perspective within Western agriculture:

‘they [farmers] are framed as a breed of men apart from society, exacerbated by an artificial division extant between the worlds of farming and business. This problematizing of farmers as men replicates patriarchal ideology of farming’.

Historically, women have played a key role in farming businesses and culture. However, they have not seen much academic attention (McElwee, 2006). In Western culture, farmers are often stereotyped as strong old men who work long hours in the fields to support their farm wives and family. This view is perhaps influenced by historical, societal practices, such as ‘primogeniture’, a tradition that meant that the first-born male inherited the farm estate and became the farm successor. An opportunity is presented here to look at the role of women in farming businesses, understanding their role in strategic farm management activities and approaches to entrepreneurship. It may be argued that female farmers construct different entrepreneurial identities to male farmers.

Typology frameworks have served as valuable tools in attempting to order the types of farming identities. The creation of typology frameworks allows scholars to understand farmers' entrepreneurial activities, helping to showcase the heterogeneity of farmers and farm enterprise activities (McElwee, 2008a; Walder and Kantelhardt, 2017). McElwee (2008) provides a taxonomy of entrepreneurial farmers, distinguishing between entrepreneurial farmers and other farmer types:

<b>Farmer as Farmer.</b> Traditionalist with farming operations purely based around the farm (pastoral, arable or mixed system).	<b>Farmer as Entrepreneur.</b> Adopts the entrepreneurial characteristics (opportunity recognition, external LoC, diversification, risk taking.
<b>Rural Entrepreneur, not farmer.</b> Land owner but not worker.	<b>Farmer as Contractor.</b> Farm based-skillset, possible ownership of plant equipment but not tied to one farm.

Table 3.3.2 Farmer Typologies (McElwee, 2008)

The ‘farmer as farmer’ type refers to those who are typically non entrepreneurial orientated and concerned with pursuing income-generating strategies through core farming activities (i.e. commercial livestock breeding). Here, farmers might be more traditionally orientated in nature, typically change-resistant and not pursue entrepreneurial strategies or exhibit the entrepreneurial characteristics discussed earlier in this chapter. This type implies that just as not all business owners are entrepreneurs, not all farmers are entrepreneurial.

An ‘entrepreneurial farmer’ is then someone who exhibits entrepreneurial behaviour and engages in entrepreneurial ventures through the farm business (McElwee and Smith, 2012). Farm entrepreneurship is a complex phenomenon and has been studied from a variety of different angles. Most choose to associate entrepreneurial farmers with those who have diversified the farm business into more lucrative areas, such as converting farm buildings and barns to cater for the tourism sectors (Vik and McElwee, 2011; Rosa et al., 2019). However, some farmers are reluctant to diversify the farm business away from commercial agricultural activities, as some do not want to alter their farming identities (Lokier et al., 2021). Therefore, it would be wrong to



assume that diversification is the sole activity in farm entrepreneurship. Still, nonetheless, it is an area that has seen an increasing area of scholarly attention over the past years and is a common strategy used by entrepreneurial farmers.

The 'rural entrepreneur, not farmer' type refers to those entrepreneurially orientated individuals who have diversified away from farming activities. These may or may not have been farmers at one point but utilise rural resources to create businesses. Examples of rural entrepreneurship might include owning rural businesses not connected to farming businesses (i.e., pubs), leasing land to farmers and organisations (i.e. shooting parties) and running tourism-related businesses (Lokier et al. 2021).

The final type McElwee (2008) notes is 'farmer as contractor'. This type highlights how farmers can utilise their [entrepreneurial] skillsets off their own farms and pursue contractual work in other areas. Examples of contracting work may include using their own machinery or borrowing machinery to work on other farms (i.e. haymaking), and helping other farmers with livestock handling and dry stone walling. Farmers with more advanced skill sets and strong acquisition of social capital may be able to find contract work. Dependent on skill set and reputation in the local rural community and beyond, farmers can generate work for themselves and delegate work to members of the farming family, forming a significant part of some farmers total FBI.

McElwee's (2008) typology has shown the multiple identities associated with 'being a farmer'. However, it is an ideal type and should not be taken as a concrete reality. Indeed, a problem with ideal type conceptualisations is that they provide simplified versions and snapshots into understanding phenomena. For example, an improper understanding of the taxonomy framework would lead one to believe that an 'entrepreneurial farmer' exists out there and is static in time, who can be studied. However, in reality, entrepreneurship is a complex process (Bruyat and Julien, 2001) and the features of the taxonomy are not as representative in real life. In practice, a

farmer might strongly resemble the features of the 'farmer as farmer' type but also be entrepreneurial at times, undertaking some contract work and engage in business opportunities in the wider rural environment. Nonetheless, typology frameworks have proven useful in understanding the EI of farmers.

It is apparent from the literature that various typologies exist which capture the skill sets associated with entrepreneurial farmers. McElwee and Bosworth (2010) note three specific skillset types required for successful farm entrepreneurship: Technical and professional farming skills, information technology and marketing skills, alongside cooperation and networking skills which require high levels of strategic awareness and entrepreneurial characteristics. Moreover, Lokier et al. (2021) find in their empirical data, those farmers who have diversified their businesses into farm shops require retail experience and skills for success, such as understanding consumer needs, stock control and marketing. In contrast, those traditionally orientated 'farmer as farmers' (McElwee, 2008) may possess different skillsets, such as being multi-trained through vocational education.

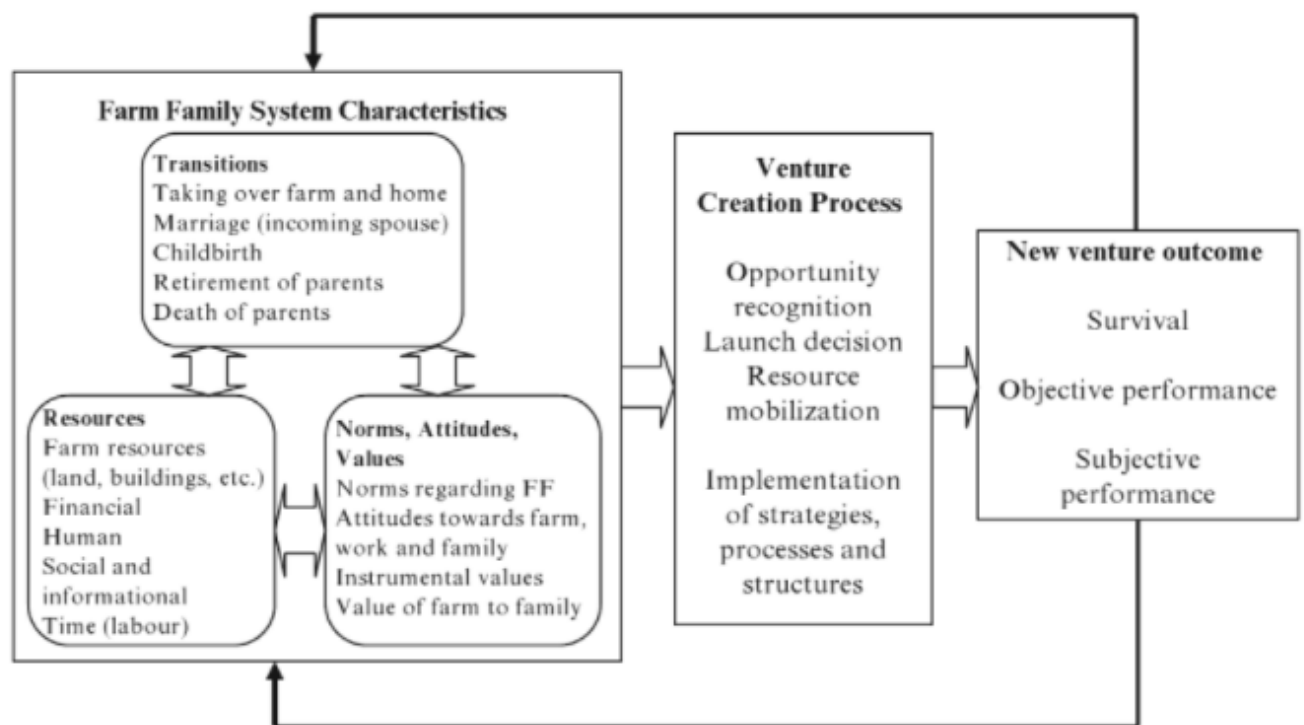
These farmer typologies are used to help conceptualise upland farmers as entrepreneurs and as strategists, being reflective of the multiple identifies farmers construct. Although only a small body of work seeks to analyse entrepreneurial farmer identities, it is evident that typology frameworks have proved helpful in theorising the construct of farm entrepreneurship (McElwee, 2008). The implications here for the thesis are that typologies can be created to help theorise 'upland farmers as entrepreneurs', focusing specifically on how entrepreneurship manifests in the upland farm sector, which relatively few research has explored thus far.

Finally, Carter (1998) and McNally (2001) argue that the same theories, themes and concepts used to analyse entrepreneurs in the business and management literature, can be applied to farm management practices. This is useful as the entrepreneurship

and strategic management themes and concepts identified in this chapter can be applied to conceptualise upland farmers as entrepreneurs and strategists. Understanding identity has proved useful in other entrepreneurship studies, thus understanding EI in a study on farmers should provide insight into how farmers create, manage and respond through the farm businesses to the challenges in the sector. However, not all business and management concepts readily apply to analysing farm businesses, so must be critically adapted to suit. Farms are businesses that have distinctive characteristics which should be acknowledged, such as the important role family has in approaches to entrepreneurship and strategy.

### 3.3.3 Family Entrepreneurship

The role of family cannot and should not be separate from an analysis of entrepreneurship in farm businesses. Family can influence the entrepreneurial activities and the strategic direction of the farm enterprise (Bettinelli et al., 2017). The focus of this sub-section is then to explore literature on family farm entrepreneurship. Jervell (2011) conceptualises the role of the family farm in new venture creation (see Figure 3.3.3 below). He argues that entrepreneurial activities on family farms can be effective in responding to policy shifts, however, farm managers need to be aware of the impact of change to the cultural heritage of the farm.



*Source:* Adapted from Aldrich and Cliff (2003, p. 14).

Figure 3.3.3 Family Farm and Venture Creation (Jervell, 2011:57)

Jervell (2011) illustrates the interrelated activities between family farm characteristics, venture creation process and new venture outcome. The model emphasises how successful family farming integrates both financial and social harmony into the business strategy. This is important to consider in farm businesses, as farmers also possess non-financial goals for the benefit of the family which can be assumed to be a facilitator or constraint to farm entrepreneurship. Jervell (2011) notes three family farm characteristics: transitions, resources and norms, and attitudes and values.

Transitions are linked to those milestones impacting the family farm, for example, the death of parents leading to the farm's succession to the son. Resources, from a resource-based view perspective, can be tangible (buildings, livestock) and intangible (business skills, education) and utilised in such a manner that can lead to strengthened market positioning and as a basis for entrepreneurial activities (Barney, 1996).

Tangible resources, land availability, soil quality and farm access can limit entrepreneurial activities, with the topographical and geographical factors coupled with economic pressures constraining entrepreneurial activity. Intangible resources are similarly important, such as human and social capital. Norms, attitudes and values play a detrimental role in entrepreneurial ventures within the farm sector. Norms refer to existing attitudes and the way things are done. However, attitudes are difficult to change, Barbieri and Mahoney (2009) highlight the important role women have in initiating entrepreneurial farm diversification strategies, bringing new knowledge to farms to increase competitive positioning. However, Jervell (2011) also notes that women have less influential power than men within farming families and they're often unable to challenge the norms, attitudes and values on farms.

Jervell (2011) conceptualises family and new venture creation dynamics in farm businesses, highlighting that a dichotomy exists between family needs and the farm enterprise. However, there are some criticisms: the focus of the study is on new venture creation, mainly farm diversification, which is not the only strategy available to farmers. The study has not explored the involvement in other farm management strategies, such as adopting technology to improve productivity, acquiring land to grow and realise economies of scale, or the decision to leave the farm sector (McElwee and Bosworth, 2010). In addition, the study is situated within the Norwegian pig and arable sector, not in the context of this thesis - upland beef and sheep farms. Each of these critiques suggests the importance of understanding the facilitators and constraints associated with the role of the family in the upland farm entrepreneurship process.

Jervell's (2011) conceptualisation of the family farm moves beyond the often incorrect assumption in farming research that an individual farmer solely runs the farm. More often than not, farms are run as a family unit. While one person may have control over some decisions (i.e. managing livestock), fundamental changes to the farm enterprise

and strategy often involve the whole family (Alsos et al., 2014). Hansson et al. (2013) finds that farming families engage in entrepreneurial activities to make use of unused resources, alongside promote business development for both lifestyle and social reasons. However, the role of the farming family in entrepreneurial activities has not been explored in relation to English upland farming. Therefore, a contextual contribution can be made in this regard.

This section has analysed literature relating to family farm entrepreneurship. Prior research shows how families can both encourage and prevent entrepreneurial farm activity. Entrepreneurial strategies can be initiated in response to policy and market changes. However, often a balance must be achieved between the business and family needs. The role of the family is essential in understanding farm entrepreneurship, and it can be a source of allowing farmers to overcome the institutional conditions within the industry. Future research needs to explore the role of family entrepreneurship. Following this section, questions can be explored in the empirical phase around family and entrepreneurship, such as:

- How does the role of family impact entrepreneurial activities in the context of upland farmers?

### 3.3.4 Institutions and Entrepreneurship

Institutions are regarded as ‘the rules of the game’ (Chowdhury et al., 2019). It is said that institutions shape entrepreneurial activity and entrepreneurial activity shapes institutions, setting the rules for economic development and impacting aspects of social life (Bosma et al., 2018).

Formal institutions encompass systems that enforce and regulate policies, laws, regulations, and rights, whereas informal institutions are products of unwritten social norms, such as traditions, customs, moral values, and religious beliefs (Pejovich,

1999). Within a farming context, the rulemaking comes from EU level policymakers, but post-Brexit, this will shift to the national level, allowing UK government to 'set the rules' for actors within the sector. This policy change might be a controversial initiative for many farmers, particularly to those who may not be ready for changes to current institutional conditions. These, amongst other things, resemble the formal institutional conditions which set the environment for farm business owners to navigate.

There are some studies that explore some institutional barriers constraining farm entrepreneurship. Maye et al. (2009) suggest how EU subsidies act as barriers to entrepreneurial activities, arguing that the appeal of regular business income relative to land ownership is a safer and more reliable source of income, preventing the exploration of other business opportunities. Similarly, Rizov et al. (2013) suggest that CAP funding introduces negative connotations to EU farmers, acting as an 'insurance' that prevents farmers from initiating entrepreneurial strategies. This thesis adds to the existing work on IE, understanding the extent to which formal institutions facilitate or constrain entrepreneurial activity in the upland farm sector.

Alongside exploring formal institutional changes (i.e. subsidy removal), this thesis explores the informal institutional challenges facing farmers and their businesses. Peter Drucker famously said 'Culture eats strategy for Breakfast,' with scholars such as Fernández-Serrano and Romero (2014) and Lee and Peterson (2000) arguing that culture can be both enabling and constraining of entrepreneurial activity. As this thesis explores both entrepreneurship and strategic management in the context of farm businesses, the theme of culture cannot be omitted from this study. Yet, the exploration of culture within farm entrepreneurship literature is fragmented, much of the research is focused around exploring farming cultures within international or a developing nations context (Cassel and Pettersson, 2015; Igwe et al., 2018), with few

exploratory and ethnographic studies exploring the realities facing English upland farmers.

One area of research that is absent from Fitz-Koch's et al. (2018) review is the area of informal and criminal farm entrepreneurship. Fitz-Koch's et al. (2018:180) main aim of the literature review is to 'appraise the main themes within agricultural research and identify key contextual aspects of the sector'. Thereby implying that informal and criminal entrepreneurship strategies are not a main theme in agricultural entrepreneurship. However, informal business strategies can be used by farmers to respond to the institutional conditions (Smith et al., 2017). Formal institutional conditions are set by the rule makers (i.e. policymakers), but it is an actor's choice whether to operate within the legal boundaries. If the current institutional environment creates a challenging scenario whereby individuals struggle to achieve profitability, then informal and criminal business strategies are a means of generating income (Smith and McElwee, 2016). It could then be argued that future research on informal/criminal entrepreneurship should not be omitted from this research, particularly as rural crime cost the UK economy almost £50 million in 2018 (NFU, 2019). Much of the industry research around rural crime positions farmers as victims, ignoring that farmers can utilise informal and criminal business strategies to sustain business competitiveness.

Some scholars have explored the informality of farming practices, organised criminal gangs and opportunist targets within the countryside (Smith and McElwee, 2017; Smith et al., 2016; McElwee et al., 2017; Smith, 2017; McElwee et al., 2017). Somerville et al. (2015) disregard the notion of the countryside being an 'idyllic space', conflicting with the 'rural idyll' (Mingay, 2017) where it is free from crime, unlike urban environments. McElwee et al. (2017) illustrate multiple levels of involvement in rural crime, such as the orchestration of criminal supply chains consisting of actors from



within farm to fork networks, spanning across rural and urban contexts to commit high profile crimes (i.e. tractor theft, illegal halal slaughter practices).

Whilst some literature exists, there appear to be some methodological weaknesses. Much of the research on informal entrepreneurship consists mainly of documentary research, storytelling and surveys, but few research practically engages with farmers. Somerville et al. (2015) call for future research to go beyond storytelling, calling for more inter-disciplinary examination and 'backyard ethnography' to develop new theories and gain knowledge into rural crime. There is a lack of sociological inquiry into literature that practically explores rural crime through farmer worldviews (Smith and McElwee, 2013). Moreover, informal entrepreneurship has not been explored in the context of upland farming. There is then an opportunity for me to draw on my industry insider positionality to explore informal/criminal entrepreneurship as a response to the institutional conditions in the upland farm sector.

It is evident from existing research that this is an under researched area. Much of the existing research is centred on rural policy research from criminology disciplines, not from management research. This thesis then builds upon informal entrepreneurship research. The focus will not be on criminal 'high profile' crimes but on informal 'grey area' activities, which farmers may use as cost-saving strategies to apply short term cash injections into the farm enterprise. Given that this thesis aims to explore the nature of farm business strategies used to respond to the constraints and challenges in the sector, it is likely that some farmers may use informal strategies to respond to the institutional conditions. The role of informal entrepreneurship should not be omitted from this thesis.

Questions around the role of institutions and farm entrepreneurship arise throughout this sub-section which could be explored, such as:

- What business strategies are farmers using to respond to the formal and informal institutional conditions within the upland farm sector?

The prior sections have drawn upon Fitz-Koch's et al. (2018) work to show how exploring the roles of identity, family and institutions in the context of upland farmers will be fruitful in understanding how farmers are responding [entrepreneurially] to the challenges in the beef and sheep sector. The following section briefly discusses methodologies present in farm entrepreneurship research, arguing how a qualitative approach can lead to the research questions being met.

### 3.3.5 Farm Entrepreneurship Methodologies

One finding from a review of the farm entrepreneurship literature is that many of the studies are quantitative. Franks (2020) analysed barriers preventing productivity in the context of UK uplands, noting several constraints facing upland farmers, such as location and landlord relationships. Likewise, Tindiwensi et al. (2020) used a quantitative approach to look at the entrepreneurial skillsets of farmers, finding that from the 378 smallholder farmers surveyed, many farmers appeared to embrace 'entrepreneurial bricolage' (operating in a resource-constrained environment) in their farm business strategies. However, the quantitative approaches used in the study's above provide little indication into how these constraints were facing farmers, only showing some statistics around the issues, ignoring the subjective lived experiences of farmers.

Strijker et al. (2020) argue there is a rise in mixed-methods rural studies research. Gittins et al. (2020) used an approach combining a numerical simulation methodology with upland farmer interviews. Likewise, Lokier et al. (2020) explored farm shop diversification amongst 181 participants and interviewed nine farm shop owners. Certainly, mixed-methods research is valuable in farm entrepreneurship research, allowing scholars to explore phenomena in both subjective and objective manners.

However, I feel much of the qualitative approaches in farm entrepreneurship studies are largely underdeveloped, and I can make a methodological contribution through this work.

In terms of wholly qualitative research, Smith et al. (2020) explore the notion of EO in the context of Scottish hill farmers, claiming to use an ethnographic methodological approach consisting of interviews, farm accounts and field notes. However, Smith et al. (2020) only incorporates interview findings within the paper and provides very little detail into the ethnographic approach. Moreover, O'Rourke (2019) investigates the concept of land abandonment in the Irish uplands of Iveragh utilising an ethnographic approach. The methodological design in O'Rourke's study (2019), consisting of farmer and agricultural stakeholder interviews, photographs and conversations, has influenced the creation of this thesis, demonstrating how to use an exploratory qualitative approach to gain insight into the realities facing farmers. Based on existing research, there is an opportunity to make a methodological contribution to literature around farm entrepreneurship by adopting a qualitative approach. A discussion around this methodological contribution is returned to in chapter five.

### 3.3.6 Further Research

This section has sought to theorise and conceptualise farmers as entrepreneurs by analysing relevant farm entrepreneurship work. Entrepreneurial identity, family entrepreneurship and institutional entrepreneurship were identified as prominent themes which are explored in greater depth within this thesis. Moreover, a discussion followed in regard to the methodologies typically used in farm entrepreneurship research. Several questions have also been raised in this section which have not been properly answered within the literature and will be explored further in the thesis: What/who is an entrepreneurial upland farmer? What types of upland farmers exist and what identities do they seek to construct? How does the role of family impact

entrepreneurial activities in the context of upland farmers? What business strategies are farmers using to respond to the institutional forces within the upland farm sector?

### 3.4 Strategic Entrepreneurship in Farming Businesses

This section aims to identify relevant concepts and themes from the area of strategic management that can be applied to analyse upland farm businesses. A definition of strategic management is analysed, before introducing the overlapping area of 'strategic entrepreneurship'. Then several strategic management concepts, including the competitive environment, farm management decision-making, strategic thinking capabilities and strategic choices, are introduced and analysed through a discussion of various research situated in agricultural contexts.

In contrast, the prior sections reviewing entrepreneurship research have discussed entrepreneurship as a process through venture creation (i.e. behavioural entrepreneurship), alongside the characteristics (i.e. trait-based approach) of entrepreneurs within the context of rural agriculture. The following sections draw upon relevant strategic management literature, examining the cross-over of the two fields (i.e. strategic entrepreneurship) to understand the research relating to farming strategies. This strategic management perspective allows me to investigate to what extent farmers possess entrepreneurial skillsets and strategic thinking capabilities and how they might use these to respond to adverse market conditions.

#### 3.4.1 Strategic entrepreneurship

The areas of strategy and entrepreneurship have some precise overlapping components. Strategic entrepreneurship is defined by Hitt et al. (2001:481) as 'entrepreneurial action with strategic perspective'. Entrepreneurship requires individuals to realise market opportunities that can be capitalised on for profit. Entrepreneurs must devise a business and trading model whereby valued products and/or services are distributed to paying customers to achieve financial sustainability.

To do this successfully, entrepreneurs must visualise some strategic direction for the business. Cox et al. (2012:27) define strategic management as:

‘the process by which managers of the firm analyze the internal and external environments for the purpose of formulating strategies and allocating resources to develop a competitive advantage in an industry that allows for the successful achievement of financial goals.’

Cox’s (2012) definition above summarises some of the central components around strategic management, suggesting how business strategies are created with consideration to internal and external environmental changes, such as attitude changes (internal) and policy changes (external), with managers re-deploying resources to meet enterprise objectives. Whilst there are some similarities between strategy and entrepreneurship, the concept of strategic entrepreneurship can be criticised, mainly because many entrepreneurship characteristics, processes and behaviours may not be considered strategic in nature. For example, entrepreneurial opportunities often arise through serendipitous encounters usually linked to generating social capital, thereby cannot be regarded as strategic or planned in nature (Dew, 2009).

Moreover, the notion of strategic entrepreneurship is difficult to apply to farm businesses, as most definitions of strategic management are orientated towards dealing with larger-scale organisations which compete with one another to achieve a competitive advantage within an industry. In the farming sector, many farms are run by one or few members of the farm family and farms are often classified as micro-businesses. Therefore, farm owners likely might not engage in formal strategic planning as microbusiness owners typically do not approach strategic management similarly to larger organisations (Hall, 2002). Moreover, strategies of the farming business are likely to incorporate non-economic and social entrepreneurship goals

that are inclusive of the farm family (Jervell, 2011). This suggests that strategic management concepts should be carefully considered and adapted, if necessary when applied to farming businesses as they might not readily apply.

Indeed, several prominent strategic management concepts and themes relate to this thesis exploring the business strategies used by farmers. These concepts include the competitive environment, responding to adverse market challenges, decision-making and strategic thinking capabilities (Barney, 1993; Porter, 1996; O'Shaughnessy, 1996; Barney, 1996). Research relating to these themes and concepts situated in agricultural contexts are now reviewed.

### 3.4.2 The Competitive Environment

Exploring the competitive environment in which farmers operate within provides an insight into the challenges facing farmers. Farmers operate in different environments compared to conventional entrepreneurs and business owners, competing within a subsidised environment and faced with opportunities and challenges not present within other sectors (McElwee et al., 2006). Moreover, farmers are not typically in direct competition with one another, often producing commodities for domestic and international markets as their primary source of income. However, those that have diversified the farm business into other areas, such as serving alternative supply chains or catering to tourism demands, will face more traditional competition than other farmers.

Some studies have explored farm competitiveness within the agricultural sector, mainly within an EU agricultural context (Gorton and Davidova, 2001; Donnellan et al., 2009). This thesis compliments existing studies by exploring strategic management practices of upland farmers during the pivotal time of the UK's EU exit.

Bachev (2012) suggests that farm competitiveness comprises of three levels:

- Farm efficiency.
- Farm adaptability.
- Farm sustainability.

Farm efficiency relates to the operational aspects of the farm, i.e. how effective the farm manager is in controlling the flow of resources to meet the strategic objectives of the farm enterprise. Adaptability refers to the ability of the farm to change alongside the external market conditions, such as adapting to policy change, disease outbreak, market prices. Finally, farm sustainability refers to the ability of the farm to continue over time, whether that be in the form of economic or environmental sustainability. It is clear then that successful farm entrepreneurs must be able to navigate and respond to challenges in the competitive environment by being efficient and adaptable to ensure the economic sustainability of the farming enterprise. However, to be successful, farmers must engage in effective decision-making.

### 3.4.3 Farm Management Decision Making (FMDM)

It is important to consider the Farm Management Decision Makers (FMDM's) when analysing strategy formulation. Groenwald (1987) suggests that decisions relating to farm activities are made by a single person, the farm holder, who is often the primary decision-maker. However, the family can influence decision-making (Jervell, 2011). Decisions are made in alignment with business and family needs, making appropriate decisions to maximise profits whilst adhering to family values, which can harm farm profitability (McElwee, 2006b). This in itself can be a source of conflict.

Farmer-Bowers (2010:141) provides some examples of the types of questions that may concern family decision making:

- ‘Should we seek off farm jobs’
- ‘How shall we educate our children’
- ‘Should we expand or sell the farm’
- ‘How should we adapt to climate change’

These examples, as Jervell (2011) suggests, comprise of both personal and business decisions. There is a limited, yet increasing, amount of attention being paid to the role of women in FMDM (Damisa and Yohanna, 2007; Nain and Kumar, 2010; Chayal et al., 2013). It may be the case that a paradigm shift has occurred in agriculture, suggesting a generational change in women involved in farm management practices, with women wanting to take up a more active role in farming activities instead of doing the traditional jobs i.e. cooking, cleaning, housework. The thesis presents an opportunity to build upon this body of work, exploring further the notion of FMDM, particularly the roles of family and levels of power in the decision-making process. Analysing FMDM should provide further insight into the strategy formulation process in upland farm businesses. It is clear from reviewing this work that farm families must engage in effective decision-making to ensure business survival and FMDM is central in helping farmers respond to the challenges in the external market.

#### 3.4.4 Responding to Challenges in the External Environment

As highlighted in the PESTLE analysis (chapter 2), many challenges are present in the external environment. There is a stream of research reporting on the crisis's which have impacted the agricultural sector over recent years, including events such as FMD, the global financial crisis and the horsemeat scandal (Phillipson et al., 2004; Petrick and Kloss, 2013; Smith and McElwee, 2021).



Phillipson et al. (2004:39) looked at the experiences and responses of rural businesses to the FMD outbreak in Northeast England, arguing that the epidemic drew attention to the challenges facing rural businesses and 'revealed much about the underlying dynamics of rural economies'. Indeed, as the FMD had both economic and social impacts, such as nationwide culling of cattle and restrictions imposed on farming businesses (Brown and Vidal, 2001), it brought rural matters to the attention of policymakers.

Likewise, the horsemeat scandal demonstrated the extent to which illegal and informal practices can exist within the food and farming supply chains. Smith and McElwee (2021) suggest how the horse meat scandal operated internationally, with criminals receiving negligible punishments for their crimes. Nonetheless, the high-profile nature of the horsemeat scandal highlighted to policymakers the lack of traceability in food and farming supply chains.

Recently, scholars have been turning attention to the impacts of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. Pandemics are not new a phenomenon and have been impacting society for thousands of years (Apostolopoulos et al., 2021). Like all sectors, the rural economies and food and farming businesses have adapted to the economic and social challenges. However, at present, there are relatively few papers on how farm entrepreneurs have responded to the constraints and challenges related to the pandemic.

Apostolopoulos et al. (2021) conducted a literature review highlighting the impact of COVID-19 on agri-food entrepreneurship, arguing that whilst the pandemic has caused challenges to actors in food and farming supply chains, it has also presented entrepreneurial opportunities. Nineteen, primarily conceptual, research articles on COVID-19 and agri-food entrepreneurship were identified by Apostolopoulos et al. (2021), arguing that small scale food producers were able to respond well by fulfilling

demands in local markets. Likewise, Lever (2021) notes a similar finding, suggesting those farmers not locked into supermarket contracts were able to capitalise on increased consumer demands due to stockpiling. Moreover, Aday and Aday (2020) review the impact of COVID-19 on food supply chains, calling for supply chains to be agile and flexible to market disruptions. In an international context, Buta et al. (2020) note that consumer eating and shopping habits changed in Romania at the start of the pandemic, with more consumers seeking to place online orders. Finally, Phillipson et al. (2020) discuss the implications of COVID-19 to the future of the rural economies, drawing on the impacts of the FMD epidemic and 2007/2008 financial crisis to inform their discussion, raising some important questions around living in a rural post-covid world:

- Will the pandemic lead to a longer-term increase in demand for local foods and shorter supply chains?
- How can the rural adapt to increasing digitalization?

Throughout the pandemic, technology has also played an essential role in keeping [rural] businesses operational. Apostolopoulos et al. (2021:165) note that ‘agri-food entrepreneurship has to change and modernize by adopting new digital technologies and innovations, allowing them to operate better even in turbulent periods’. However, Apostolopoulos does not acknowledge the barriers facing technology adoption in the rural economies, such as poor broadband infrastructure, lack of farmer skillsets and age of farm holder (Bowen and Morris, 2019; Gittins et al., 2020). This presents an opportunity to explore further the role of technology in the thesis, understanding how farmers have utilised technology and innovation to respond to adverse market conditions.

There does appear to be a small but certainly growing body of research exploring COVID-19 and its impacts on rural food and farming businesses. Following the

discussions above, an opportunity is presented to explore the specific COVID-19 related challenges facing upland farmers. Much of the prior research is of a conceptual nature, with a distinct lack of empirical research. A gap in the literature is presented in regard to understanding how farmers have responded [entrepreneurially] to the constraints and challenges resulting from the pandemic. The timely nature of this thesis allowed me to collect data around this emerging phenomenon and contribute to the crisis management literature. Thus, understanding the extent in which entrepreneurial skillsets and strategic thinking capabilities have been used to respond to the realities in the sector.

#### 3.4.5 Strategic Thinking Capabilities

There is a multitude of strategic choices available to farmers depending upon the operation of the farming enterprise. The strategic thinking capabilities of farmers influence these choices. The notion of strategic thinking has seen increasing attention in the strategic management literature (Heracleous, 1998b; Liedtka, 1998; O'Neill and Horner, 2021). STC is often defined as a broad term encompassing all aspects of strategy from conceptualisations and business vision to planning and control enterprise resources and the deliverance of business objectives (Liedtka, 1998). However, like much generic entrepreneurship and strategic management concepts, the extent of strategic thinking capabilities in farming enterprises is less explored. Vik and McElwee (2011) consider strategic thinking a component of the 'entrepreneurial farmer' and thus a concept that deserves attention.

Some research looks at approaches to strategic management in agricultural businesses. For example, Stanford-Billington and Cannon (2010) explore strategic management activities in 144 farms across the South of England, finding few farmers formally have written strategic plans and possess an overall lack of vision and goal setting. Strategic management tools, such as benchmarking and PESTLE analyses common in other sectors, are not commonly used by farmers (Stanford-Billington and

Cannon, 2010). Furthermore, Wolf et al. (2007) suggest a general lack of strategic planning in farm businesses, suggesting in the agricultural sector, farmers have a reluctance to learn new skills.

McElwee and Smith (2013:124) present a typology of ten common strategic choices which are now discussed:

1. Growth by land expansion
2. Growth by animal expansion
3. Enlarging capacity and adding value by vertical integration
4. External business
5. Cooperation with other farmers
6. Diversification
7. Migrate into non-agricultural employment
8. Different use of capacity by specialisation
9. Leave farming
10. Do nothing

Growth by land and animal expansion is a common strategy used by farmers. Larger farms have the ability to reach economies of scale, keeping production costs at a minimum and sustaining market positioning (McElwee, 2008). However, it is not an option for some farmers due to access to land in local areas.

Vertical and horizontal integration allows farmers to grow, realise economies of scale and expand network types (Rehber, 1998). However, not all farmers possess the resources or capabilities to be able to engage in vertical or horizontal integration. It may be argued that this strategic choice is better suited for those farmers with access to greater resources.

Cooperation with other farmers is seen as an appropriate growth strategy, engaging in effective knowledge transfer alongside sharing equipment to improve quality, improve productivity and mitigate risks. However, McElwee and Bosworth (2010) suggest that those less entrepreneurially orientated farmers utilise only family and friend networks, implying that conventional farmers may be less inclined to engage in collaborative practices.

Diversification is one strategy often initiated by women in farming families, which can add significant financial capital to the farming enterprise. Slocum et al. (2017) explore farm shop diversification strategies in the UK, highlighting the need to develop skill sets, network with people inside and outside of farming and encourage community engagement to ensure successful farm diversification. Indeed, diversification is a suitable choice if farmers possess adequate skillsets. However, diversifying into specific areas (i.e., tourism) can conflict with the identities farmers are trying to construct (Lokier et al., 2021). Migrate into non-farming activities is another option, such as stepping back from roles. Other options could include leaving the farm sector or simply, doing nothing.

Indeed, there appear to be many strategic choices available to farmers in managing their farm businesses. However, these have not been sufficiently explored in the context of English upland farmers. This raises questions around the extent to which upland farmers possess strategic thinking capabilities and the types of strategic choices farmers are using to respond to the realities in the sector. In the prior section, a research question emerged i.e., How might the challenges facing English upland beef and sheep farmers be constraining of entrepreneurial activity?

Another research question has now emerged incorporating this strategic entrepreneurship perspective:

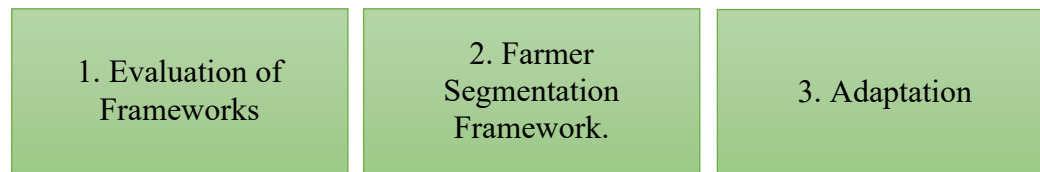
- RQ: To what extent are farmers using entrepreneurial farm business strategies to respond to the realities in the beef and sheep sector?

This research question builds upon the first one by not just exploring the constraints and challenges facing farmers but also considers the [entrepreneurial] nature of strategies used to respond to the challenges in the sector.

### 3.5 Summary

This literature review has reviewed sources from the areas of entrepreneurship and strategic management research. From the review, two sub-research questions have emerged which are explored within this study to help explore the realities facing upland farmers. Debates from the rural entrepreneurship literature have been presented, looking specifically at the role of 'spatial context' and 'constrained entrepreneurship' in farm businesses. Then, a discussion on three emerging future areas of research presented by Fitz-Koch et al. (2018) followed: EI, family entrepreneurship and formal and informal institutions in the context of upland farmers. Then the final section of the review focused on identifying strategic management concepts and themes and applying them to the farm sector, conceptualising farmers as strategic entrepreneurs. Themes within entrepreneurship and strategy within the farm sector were both found to be lacking in research terms. This thesis aims to explore these areas in the data collection phase and build upon existing farm research. The following chapter discusses the conceptual framework which influences the design of this study.

## Chapter Four: Conceptual Framework, The Upland Farmer Segmentation Framework



### 4.0 Introduction

This chapter introduces an adapted version of McElwee's (2004; 2012) Farmer Segmentation Framework (FSF) to help meet the wider research aim i.e., exploring the realities facing English upland beef and sheep farmers. It is titled 'The Upland Farmer Segmentation Framework.' This chapter aims to devise a suitable conceptual framework that can be used to analyse the entrepreneurial and strategic management dimensions and practices that occur in upland farming businesses.

This chapter begins with a discussion as to why existing strategic management frameworks do not readily apply themselves to an analysis of farming businesses and I provide a rationale as to why one must be created (Section 4.1). Then, McElwee's FSF is presented as a useful framework to aid my analysis (Section 4.2), however, after a critical evaluation it was adapted to analyse specifically upland farm businesses. Following this adaptation, the framework's incorporation into the thesis is discussed, linking it to the study's research questions and objectives (Section 4.3). The chapter then concludes with a synthesis of key discussions.

## 4.1 Existing strategic management frameworks

Scholars use various strategic management frameworks to analyse business strategies. Two of the most cited frameworks, Porter's (1980) Generic Strategies Model (GSM) and the Ansoff Matrix (Ansoff, 1957) are now introduced and discussed, arguing why these frameworks cannot be readily applied to farming businesses.

### 4.1.1 Porter's Generic Strategies

Porter's GSM is a popular strategic management framework; its simple design has led to use in both academia and industry (Watts et al., 1998; Kim et al., 2004; Allen and Helms, 2007; De Waal, 2016). The essence of the model is that business owners can obtain a competitive advantage positioning in the marketplace by pursuing one of three strategies: cost leadership, differentiation or focus. Cost leadership refers to selling high volumes of products at a lower price than competitors, capturing market share. Differentiation refers to customers paying a premium price based upon the product or service quality. Both of these strategy types can also be 'focused' within a specific market segment. Porter (1980) coins the phrase 'strategic purity', arguing that pursuing these types of strategies can ultimately lead an organisation to a competitive advantage positioning.

This concept of 'strategic purity' is empirically supported by Thornhill and White (2007: 553), who concluded that 'purity does appear to pay' after analysing over two thousand businesses and their strategies, finding a significant relationship between performance and pure strategies. However, Porter (1980) warned of organisations trying to pursue multiple strategies simultaneously and being left in a 'stuck in the middle' position, suggesting an overall lack of strategic awareness and planning can be detrimental to competitive positioning. Rather Porter argued that business owners should select either cost, differentiation or focus strategies, and seek to do it well.



However, it is important to differentiate between Porter's 'stuck in the middle' strategies and 'hybridization<sup>7</sup>', as it is known that some organisations can, indeed, achieve a competitive advantage through both cost and differentiation. Salavou (2015: 89) has criticised Porter's 'stuck in the middle strategies' for being an underdeveloped form of hybrid strategies. The specific features of Porter's GSM, namely cost leadership and differentiation strategies, are now explored and applied to farming businesses.

		Competitive Advantage	
		Cost	Different
Competitive Scope	Broad	Cost Leadership	Differentiation
	Narrow	Cost Focus	Differentiation Focus

Figure 4.1.1: Porter's (1980) GSM

#### *Cost Leadership*

Cost leadership strategies revolve around keeping operating costs as low as possible, profits are achieved through process and operational excellence (Treacy and

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<sup>7</sup> Hybridization- The active pursuit of more than one type of Porter's strategies i.e. offering low cost high quality flights.

Wiersema, 1992). A competitive advantage can be achieved by realising economies of scale, technology and innovation adoption, record keeping, benchmarking, finance management and effective business planning (Tanwar, 2013). However, achieving a competitive advantage via cost leadership strategies in the farming sector could be difficult for several reasons outlined in the next paragraphs.

First, McElwee (2006) suggests that many farmers lack core management qualities, such as strategic planning and finance skills. Bowen and Morris (2019) and Gittins et al. (2020) note upland farmers typically do not use high levels of technology as seen in other industries, suggesting difficulties in reducing operating costs. Therefore, many farmers may lack the necessary capabilities and resources to reach a form of process excellence in the farm business to achieve a competitive advantage through this strategy.

Second, there is great volatility in the beef and lamb market, which makes controlling costs difficult (Bmpa, 2020). Production in the farm sector differs from other industries as farmers are producing commodities for uncertain prices. Farmers, and other actors in the farm to fork supply chain, are receptive to macroeconomic changes, being price-takers, not price givers (Dani, 2015). It is difficult for farmers to calculate their business costs due to uncertain market prices. The financial information provided in the PESTLE analysis (section 2.4.2) shows how upland farmers make a net loss on agricultural activities and have a strong reliance on subsidy payments and other income streams, which makes controlling costs in farm businesses difficult.

Third, costs are variable and can be influenced by the personal characteristics of the farmer, business characteristics and the activities and processes connected to the farm (McElwee and Smith, 2012). Farm productivity can vary depending upon the size, performance and management style. Farm ownership (i.e. tenant, owner, land manager) impacts business costs through entitlements to subsidies and grants.

Moreover, uncontrollable variables present in the sector, such as weather, make it difficult for any farmer, let alone those with limited education and resources, to sustain a competitive advantage positioning through a cost leadership strategy.

Finally, Porter's GSM is underpinned with the assumption that business owners are pursuing strategies to improve economic performance and competitive positioning. However, some farmers also possess non-economic and social entrepreneurship goals (McElwee, 2006), meaning business activities and decisions might not be the most rational and cost-effective. The differentiation component of Porter's GSM is now discussed in relation to farm businesses.

### *Differentiation*

Differentiation strategy refers to obtaining a competitive advantage through the uniqueness of a product or service (Porter, 1980). This may be achieved through produce/service quality (i.e., features, reliability, durability), distribution (i.e. logistics and supply chain function) and through effective branding and marketing (Porter, 1985). Customers are willing to pay a higher price because it is remarkably different to that of competitors.

However, differentiation in the beef and lamb sector can be difficult. The extent to which farm businesses can differentiate themselves is questionable, as many upland farmers are producing homogenous products (i.e., commodities: beef, lamb, wool). Moreover, farmers compete in subsidised environments, which is different to the markets Porter had in mind when he referred to direct competition within an industry (Porter, 1985). Therefore, this section of the GSM is not totally applicable to the upland farm sector.

Indeed, some farmers can differentiate their businesses to an extent. On-farm and off-farm diversification add a dimension to farm businesses where there is a level of direct

competition. Depending upon the scale of activities (i.e. local, regional, national) and resources available, farmers can reach larger markets. However, to diversify successfully, particular skill sets are required (McElwee et al., 2006).

### *GSM Summary*

Overall, an application of Porter's GSM is weak in nature as the model was not designed to consider the heterogenic nature of farming businesses. While examples can be given of types of differentiation, cost leadership and focus strategies, for a proficient analysis, farm businesses need to be analysed differently from other businesses due to the environment in which they operate. A framework should be selected which can accommodate the heterogeneity of farm businesses. The following section now analyses another popular strategic management model, the Ansoff Matrix.

#### 4.1.2 Ansoff Matrix

The Ansoff Matrix displays four potential growth options available for businesses: Market Penetration, Market Development, Product Development and Diversification

		Existing Products	New Products
Existing Markets		Market Penetration e.g. Increasing stocking density	Product Development e.g. Technology adoption
		Market Development e.g. Direct selling	Diversification e.g. legal or illegal strategies

Figure 4.1.2 Application to the Ansoff Matrix (Ansoff, 1957)

(Meldrum and McDonald, 1995). The growth strategies are based on two variables: access to products or services (either new or existing) and access to markets (either new or existing). A degree of risk surrounds each option, with those strategies centred around accessing new products and new markets (i.e., diversification) being the riskiest strategic choice. In the following sections, the features of the Ansoff Matrix are critically applied to upland farm businesses.

### *Market Penetration*

Market penetration is seen as the least risky of all the growth options. It involves growth through an existing product base and market, such as increasing sales from existing products. The main advantages of this growth strategy are businesses can focus on markets they already have experience in serving. However, organisations need to be aware of the limitations of market growth and consider whether the current market can facilitate growth.

In the farm sector, a market penetration strategy could achieve business growth through expansion (McElwee and Smith, 2013). Depending upon market conditions (i.e., auction prices), farmers may choose to grow their enterprises by rearing more livestock and make efficiency gains through economies of scale. However, this depends on market conditions remaining favourable and farmers having the necessary resource base to accommodate growth strategies. If market conditions remain poor, farmers may seek profit generation through market development strategies.

### *Market Development*

Market development is a growth strategy where businesses increase market positioning through selling existing products in new markets. This can be in the form of expanding geographically into emerging economies, developing economies etc. However, it should be noted that this strategy carries a greater risk than market penetration strategies. This strategy may be pursued if existing markets have become saturated. Market development strategies in the farm sector may comprise farmers selling their livestock privately, instead of through auction marts, to people located at different geographical regions for an above market price. This could be a means of farmers selling livestock for greater prices; however, farmers would have to find and access these new markets.

### *Product Development*

Product development is a growth strategy where new products and services are introduced to existing markets. Product development strategies work well when combined with market penetration strategies. An example within the farm sector could be introducing new farm technology to the farm system. By introducing new farm technology, growth can likely be achieved by making efficiency gains and achieving economies of scale. However, in the literature, farm technology adoption was severely lacking on upland farms (Morris et al., 2017; Gittins et al., 2020).

### *Diversification*

Diversification is often seen as the riskiest of the growth strategies (Hussain et al., 2013). This strategy is based on offering new products and services in new markets. Farm diversification is a research phenomenon in its regard, with numerous papers focusing on barriers to diversification and skillsets required to diversify successfully

(Barbieri and Mahoney, 2009; Vik and McElwee, 2011; Slocum et al., 2017; Smith et al., 2017). Diversification can, if done correctly, add significant value to farming enterprises. However, diversification requires a particular set of skillsets to add value to farm businesses. McElwee's et al. (2006) paper illustrates that even though some entrepreneurial farmers follow 'textbook' characteristics of entrepreneurial behaviour, ventures still often fail. As such, farmers should exercise caution and ensure that resources and competencies are in place before engaging in entrepreneurial farm ventures. Farmers might even seek to pursue illegal diversification strategies, using informal and criminal means to achieve business growth (Smith and McElwee, 2017).

One point which should be highlighted about the Ansoff Matrix is that the four growth options are not absolute. Meaning a business, a farm business for example, can grow through all of the options at the same time. A farm can be made up of different business activities, diversified activities (i.e. camping site), product development (i.e. introduce new products to existing base), market development (i.e. private livestock sales when market conditions are unfavourable) and market penetration (i.e. grow through land acquisition).

### *Ansoff Matrix Summary*

While applying the Ansoff Matrix has been more helpful than applying Porter GSM, allowing potential growth strategies to be explored in farming businesses, an analysis can only be made on a basic level. Moreover, this analysis could largely only be done due to a thorough understanding of farm businesses from the literature and my own understanding from my insider positionality. Arguably, a much deeper and robust analysis could be made by analysing farm businesses in relation to a framework that incorporates rural businesses' heterogenic nature. Luckily, such a framework exists,

and this analysis of farming businesses continues in the next sections, introducing the farmer segmentation framework (McElwee, 2004).

#### 4.1.3 Summary of Strategic Management Frameworks

This section has critically assessed two strategic management frameworks in relation to the thesis. Whilst the two models can be applied to farm businesses, they are not designed to do so. Moreover, the generic nature of the models does not capture the specific characteristics of farming businesses. Applying these frameworks to an upland farming context demonstrates a need to create specific frameworks to examine farm businesses (McElwee and Smith, 2012). The following section presents McElwee's (2004) FSF, which is to be adapted as a conceptual tool to explore farm strategies in relation to English upland farm businesses.

#### 4.2 Introducing the Farmer Segmentation Framework

The purpose of this section is to present McElwee's (2004) FSF. Its origins and components are critically discussed. As part of a wider research project examining the concept of entrepreneurship within the farm sector, McElwee devised the FSF (McElwee, 2008). It was used as a data collection instrument and an 'iterative device' to categorise and analyse farmers and their businesses across a standardised set of criteria (McElwee and Smith, 2012). McElwee (2008) used both quantitative and qualitative data from EU countries to devise the framework which helps analyse and understand entrepreneurial farming businesses. The FSF can be used to both evaluate farm skillsets and identify skillsets where farmers require support to become 'entrepreneurially successful' (McElwee, 2008: 21). The FSF has three parts: personal characteristics of the farmer, business characteristics, and business activities and processes connected to the farm. In the following sections, these parts are presented and critically discussed.



#### 4.2.1 Personal Characteristics of Farmers

Length of Time Farming	Entrepreneurial Alertness	Motivations to Diversify	Status	Gender	Age	Educational Skillset
0-5 Years 5-10 Years 10 Years+	Alert Non-Alert	Push Factors (Unemployment, Job Satisfaction and Redundancy)  Pull Factors (Freedom, Security, Satisfaction)	Owner Tennant Manager	Male Female	<30 <45 45+	Unskilled Technical Training Higher education
			Sole Trader/Self Employed/ Independent trader Family Business Management Team Subsidiary			

Table 4.2.1 Personal Characteristics (McElwee, 2008)

Table 4.2.1 above shows criteria that form the personal characteristics of farmers in the FSF. Exploring these personal characteristics helps scholars to conceptualise ‘farmers as entrepreneurs’ (McElwee, 2006). Some of these characteristics could perhaps be facilitating or constraining factors in farm entrepreneurship, therefore, should be explored when collecting data on farmers. For example, gender has different implications in the farm entrepreneurship process, sometimes constraining in some contexts (Ghouse et al., 2017). Equally, gender can be seen as a facilitating factor, with often women on the farm initiating diversification strategies (Jervell, 2011). Likewise, the age of farm holder is important as it might be assumed that EO declines as farmers become older (Lévesque and Minniti, 2011). Status (i.e., farm ownership) can be both a constraining and facilitating factor in entrepreneurial ventures (Alsos et al., 2014). For example, constraints and challenges might differ between landowner and tenant farmers. Length of time farming and level of education also might impact the entrepreneurial orientation and strategies used by farmers. An analysis of these personal factors provides insight into the characteristics of [entrepreneurial] farm business owners.

McElwee and Smith (2012: 125) state personal characteristics are useful in ‘profiling and gauging the entrepreneurial alertness’ of farmers, using Kirzner’s theory of alertness (Kirzner, 1979). However, in this study, I am not using one particular entrepreneurship theory i.e., Kirzner’s entrepreneurial alertness. Instead, I have identified several entrepreneurship theories which could aid my analysis of farm entrepreneurship in the English uplands, such as Schumpeter’s notion of ‘creative destruction’ and other theories, themes and concepts which are relevant to the personal characteristics of farmers, such as Entrepreneurial Identity (Fitz-Koch et al., 2017) and other trait-based characteristics (Carland et al., 1988) such as N-ach, LoC and resilience (Baldegger et al., 2017). The personal characteristics of this framework are developed and adapted in relation to upland farming businesses later in this chapter (Section 4.3). But first, other elements of the framework are now analysed.

### 4.2.2 Business Characteristics

Farm Size	Primary Sector	Diversification	Stages of Life Cycle	Topography	Performance	Environment
Small <40 ESU	Crops	Agriculture	Nascent	Lowland	Low	Labour
Medium 40-100 ESU	Arable	Aquaculture	Newly	Upland	Medium	Intensive
Medium 100-200 ESU	Livestock	Animal Care	Diversified	Highland	High	Machine
Medium 200-400 ESU	Intensive	Conservation				Intensive
Large 400-600 ESU	Livestock	Countryside	Growth			Material
Large 600-800 ESU		Attraction	Survival			Intensive
Large 800-1000 ESU		Equine	/Decline			Knowledge
Very Large 1000-1500 ESU		Engineering				Intensive
Very Large 1500-2000 ESU		Horticulture				
Very Large >2000 ESU		Tourism				
	Pig Sheep Cattle Other				Growth Intention/Expectation High Medium Low No Growth	

Table 4.2.2 Business Characteristics

Table 4.2.2 above shows the business characteristics used to analyse farm businesses in the FSF. McElwee and Smith (2012) argue that the understanding of farm business characteristics is useful because it allows for an assessment of the entrepreneurial

nature of the farm business unit. Analysing the business characteristics helps scholars move beyond the trait (i.e. characteristics) approach and more towards a behavioural approach to entrepreneurship, turning attention to the 'dance' (businesses) as opposed to the dancer (farm entrepreneur) (Gartner, 1988). Underpinning this thesis with these entrepreneurship concepts allows me to examine multiple units of analysis of the farm entrepreneur.

Exploring business characteristics provides information around the resources at the disposal to the entrepreneur, potentially indicating strengths and weaknesses to the farm business, showing the tangible and structural components relating to the farm and what the [farm] entrepreneur has created. These business characteristics tell a rich story about the farming enterprise, allowing me to compare and contrast farming enterprises based upon different factors, such as farm size, location and performance. These farm business characteristics can then be compared with the information around farmers' personal characteristics, for example, showing the types of farm businesses female farmers create compared to male farmers.

The FSF was devised to segment European farms, McElwee used European Size Unit (ESU) as the measurement. However, the FSF's current form is not entirely applicable to analysing upland farm businesses. It is more fitting to use hectares in a UK farming context. In addition, the FSF was used to segment all types of farmers (i.e., pig, livestock, cropping etc.), which is irrelevant in this study as the focus sector is the upland livestock sector, known by Defra as the Less Favourable Area (LFA's) of the UK. The final section of the framework is now critically discussed.

#### 4.2.3 Business Activities and Processes

Market Development	Technology and Innovation	Support Networks	Forms of Collaboration	Barriers to Diversification	Strategic Awareness
Geographical Expansion Regional National International	Advanced High Low None	Grants Networks Professional Services Family/Friends	Clusters Networks Alliances Informal	Business Model Uncertainty Cost Concerns Security Legal Issues Economies of Scale Legislation Experience Curve	None Some Aware Planned Stages
Markets Imports Exports					

Table 4.2.3 Business Activities and Processes

Table 4.2.3 above shows the business activities undertaken by farmers which are influenced by the personal and farm business characteristics. McElwee and Smith (2012: 125) suggest this layer helps researchers to 'build up a profile of the entrepreneurial nature of a rural SBU and, more importantly, predict how the owners could re-orientate their attitude towards diversification and pluricativity'. This is interesting as this part of the framework goes beyond an analysis of the personal and business characteristics, extending to identifying skillset strengths and weaknesses. Opportunities and barriers to growth can be analysed here. Market development shows how a farmer plans to expand geographically and through which markets.

Technology adoption indicates the farm's current use and how more technology and innovation can be implemented to achieve growth. Support networks and collaboration show the extent to which farmers utilise support from others by acquiring social capital to achieve growth (Bourdieu, 1986; Arnott et al., 2021). McElwee and Bosworth (2010) note entrepreneurial farmers utilise contacts beyond the immediate family and friend network. Finally, the strategic awareness of farmers can be assessed, understanding the extent to which farmers engage in strategic planning.

McElwee's FSF allows for a more nuanced understanding of rural businesses than both Porter's GSM and the Ansoff Matrix. It provides a greater understanding because it has specifically been designed with rural businesses in mind and reflects their distinctive heterogeneity. While most of the components of the FSF are relevant to analysing upland farm businesses, an adapted version in the context of this study should incorporate some 'strategic entrepreneurship' concepts and specific dimensions relevant specifically to upland farming, as a key aim of the thesis is understanding entrepreneurial farm strategies in the upland sector. The following section builds upon this, presenting an adaptation of the FSF for this thesis.

### 4.3 Adapting and applying the Farmer Segmentation Framework

The purpose of this section is to present an adapted version of the FSF. This framework is devised from the criticisms of the framework's features presented earlier and allows me to create a more tailored model to analyse upland farm businesses specifically.

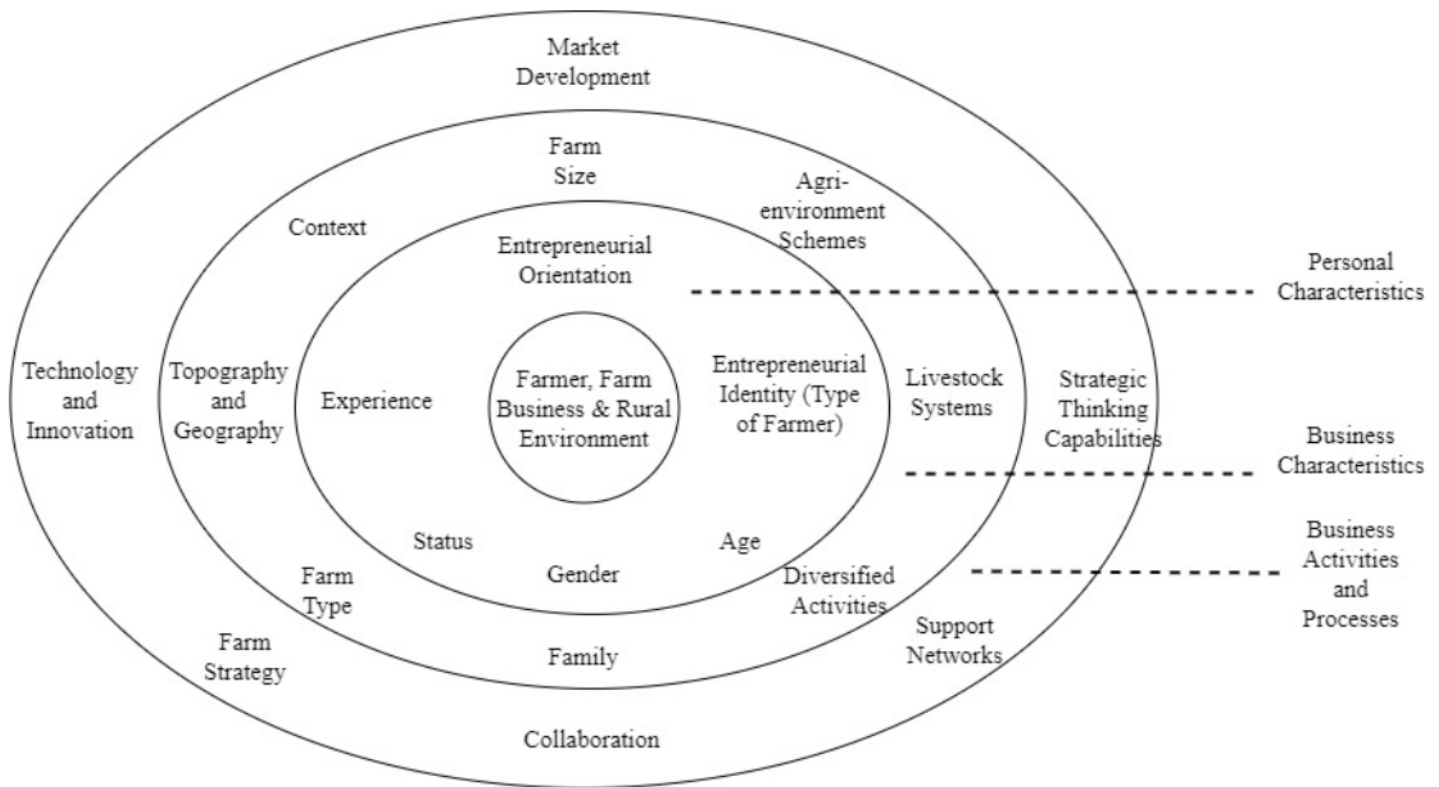


Figure 4.3 Adapted Upland Farmer Segmentation Framework (Author Generated)

Figure 4.3 above displays an adapted version of McElwee's FSF, and the changes to the original model are now discussed. First, the design of the FSF has been changed to reduce the complexity of its use. The original FSF spanned over three A4 pages, whereas this model has been simplified to half a page, making it visually appealing, with the three stages being integrated into one framework.

Second, the rigidness of the model has been reduced. Instead of researchers using it as an iterative device, the categories of the model be used as points of discussion and interaction when collecting data on farmers. Researchers can now move back and forth between categories on each of the different layers in one simple to use illustration, reducing the framework's complexity. The inclusion of these features on three layers makes it easy to do this. By no means do scholars have to seek to investigate each category. However, exploring each one provides insight into the heterogenic nature of farmers and their enterprises.

Third, the FSF has now been modified to analyse upland farming businesses specifically. New categories have been added, old ones have been tweaked, and some removed. Theories, themes and concepts from the literature review (chapter three) have been incorporated, including EO and EI to help better understand the personal trait-based characteristics of farmers. Moreover, strategy concepts such as strategic choices and strategic thinking capabilities have been added to conceptualise beyond 'farmers as entrepreneurs' (McElwee, 2006) but also conceptualise farmers as 'strategic entrepreneurs'.

This adapted model is used as an exploratory tool in the data collection phase. It is used to help meet the research questions identified in the prior chapter:

- RQ1: To what extent are English upland farmers using entrepreneurial strategies to respond to the realities facing the beef and sheep sector?
- RQ2: How might the challenges facing English upland beef and sheep farmers be constraining of entrepreneurial activity?

This conceptual framework developed can be useful in the methodological stages of collecting data and in analysing the empirical data. When interviewing farmers,

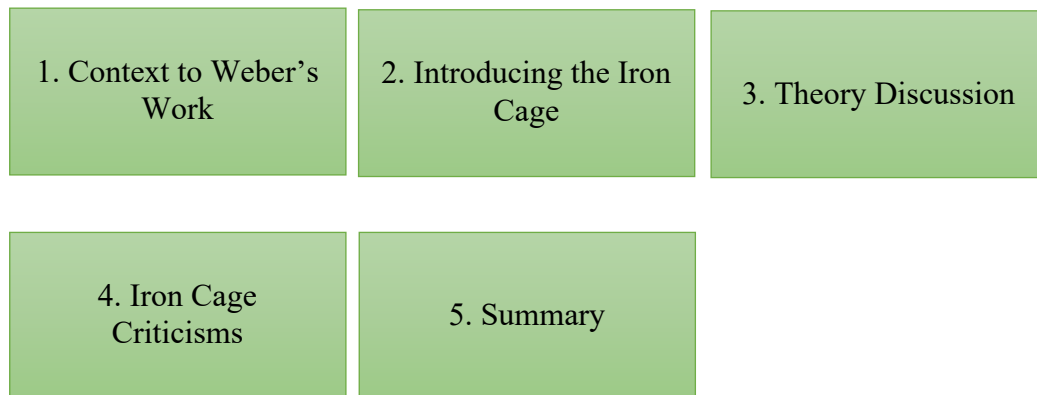


discussions around the farmer, farm business and connected processes and activities will provide insight into the challenges facing them in their daily lives. Like the original framework, it will also serve as a tool to identify skillset strengths and weaknesses. Thus, it will help identify areas where upland farmers require greater support in their farm management practices. Moreover, the framework can be used to analyse the different units of analysis, looking at what farm entrepreneurs create (i.e. behavioural approach), alongside the characteristics associated with entrepreneurial farmers (i.e. trait-based approach). More details about how this conceptual model is used in the data collection and analytical stages is detailed in the methodology chapter (Chapter six, section 6.2).

#### 4.5 Chapter Summary

Throughout this chapter, a revised version of McElwee's (2004) FSF has been presented. This chapter began by analysing existing strategic management frameworks in the context of farming businesses. It has been found that conventional strategy frameworks do little to evaluate farming businesses, as farmers do not operate in the same competitive environments these frameworks were designed to analyse. Therefore, they are deemed inappropriate for an evaluation of farm business management strategies in this thesis and will only provide scholars with limited and general information. The adapted FSF is later used as an exploratory tool to help meet the study's research aim and objectives. A farm business-specific strategy and entrepreneurship framework allows sufficient evaluation and conceptualisation of farm entrepreneurship and strategic management. Its incorporation provides a sound theoretical underpinning in analysing farmer's and their enterprises, providing a starting point to analyse farmers and their worlds. The following chapter discusses the theoretical underpinning of this research.

## Chapter Five: Theoretical Underpinning, Max Weber's Iron Cage



### 5.0 Introduction

This chapter aims to select and justify an appropriate theoretical lens to enable an exploration of the research topic, i.e. an exploration into the realities facing English upland beef and sheep farmers. Throughout this chapter, three central themes are discussed: the importance of theory, what Weber offers me personally, and how his work can be utilised in the context of upland farming. This chapter justifies the use of a Weberian underpinning, providing a theoretical lens to explore farmers in their contexts, allowing me to explore the entrepreneurial nature of upland farmers and identify the strategies farmers are using to respond to the realities facing the beef and sheep sector.

This chapter is structured as follows. First, a contextual overview of Weber's work is provided, introducing *verstehen*, legitimation and ideal types (Section 5.1). This is done as the iron cage cannot be introduced without first having a firm understanding of these core concepts. Second, the iron cage metaphor is then introduced; here a rationale is provided to legitimate why Weber's work can be used to provide a theoretical underpinning to a study of farmers (Section 5.2). Third, theory is discussed, defining it and assessing its role in this thesis (Section 5.3). Fourth, criticisms of

Weber's iron cage are discussed, offering various alterations of the metaphor which form a theoretical lens to explore 'constrained entrepreneurship' in the English uplands (Section 5.4).

## 5.1 Context to Weber's Work

The purpose of this section is to briefly introduce Weber and present a background to his work, as the iron cage metaphor cannot first be introduced without providing a significant context around Weber's seminal ideas. Three concepts are discussed: *verstehen*, legitimation and ideal types.

Max Weber is regarded as one of the greatest Western sociologists and thinkers in recent history (Weber, 2017; Wæraas, 2018). Alongside the writings of Durkheim and Marx, Weber's work has been used to underpin much research across the social science disciplines (Outhwaite, 1975; Kalberg, 1980; Kaelber, 2002; Feest, 2010; Serpa and Ferreira, 2019). Weber's analysis of power, religion and social order within socio-economic systems led to the creation and popularisation of many theoretical and philosophical concepts which underpin contemporary research, with researchers using Weber's theories of modernity, bureaucracy and rationalization to investigate various social phenomena occurring in organisational contexts (Serpa and Ferreira, 2019). However, his work has not been utilised in the context of upland farming. This chapter contributes to existing literature on the use of theory in business management research and rural sociology by presenting Weber's iron cage metaphor as a theoretical underpinning to gain knowledge into management practices in upland farm enterprises. *Verstehen* is now discussed as it is a central philosophical concept emphasised by Weber and underpins much qualitative social science research.

### 5.1.1 *Verstehen*

*Verstehen* relates to the exploration of social phenomena through an interpretative understanding (Outhwaite, 1975). Simply, it means empathetically understanding aspects of social behaviours to understand the meaning behind actions (Tucker, 1965). Weber was not the creator of the term *verstehen*, he did however popularise it (Outhwaite, 1975). Two German historians, Johann Droysen and Wilhelm Dilthey, used it to challenge the positivistic led approach dominating the social sciences at the time (Outhwaite, 1975; Maclean, 1982). Scientific inquiry was dominated by positivist thinkers using *Erklären*, explanation, to understand social behaviours in an objective manner using quantitative methods, attempting to explain social phenomena using the same methods as the natural scientist (Feest, 2010).

Outhwaite (1975: 12) summarises this positivist dominated view with a quote from Karl Marx: ‘natural science will one day incorporate the science of one man... there will be a single science’. However, through the work of Droysen, Dilthey and Weber, *verstehen*-based research began to be adopted by scholars to explore interpretively social phenomena through a more subjective lens. Through *verstehen*, researchers can explore subjective social phenomena to interpretatively understand individual meanings, feelings, attitudes, and perceptions in ways that could never be achieved using *Erklären* (Rashid, 2015). Its focus on exploring subjective issues aligns well with the qualitative nature of this study (detailed further in chapter six).

The concept of *verstehen* underpins this qualitative thesis. McElwee (2008) in his reflective piece discussing his own theoretical and philosophical assumptions when interviewing farmers, illustrates how he incorporates *verstehen* into his work to conceptualise ‘farmers as entrepreneurs’ and enter various farmer worldviews. *Verstehen* is used in this study to subjectivity explore the worldviews of upland

farmers. This powerful concept will be returned to in the philosophical and methodological chapters of the thesis. The concept of legitimation is now discussed as it is a dominant theme underpinning much of Weber's work on power, domination and bureaucracy, which forms some key discussions later in the thesis (section 5.3).

### 5.1.2 Legitimation

Legitimacy is the belief that a system is legitimate, that is people within a system have faith and acknowledge its existence, perceiving it to be real (Grafstein, 1981). Thereby, legitimation can be defined as the process of how a system becomes legitimate. Weber attempts to analyse the legitimacy of the modern state across political, religious and economic contexts (Beetham, 2016). Weber was concerned with the transition of power to authority through the legitimation process within both organisational and political level systems (Wæraas, 2018).

Legitimacy links to Institutional Entrepreneurship outlined in chapter three (section 3.3.4), with issues around legitimacy occurring at both the macro and micro level, within formal and informal institutional conditions. Whilst legitimation is not a dominant theoretical concept in this study, it is important to be aware of its relevance. Legitimation does underpin other crucial Weberian concepts that are applied to form a theoretical underpinning to investigate constrained entrepreneurship in the English uplands. It may be anticipated that issues around legitimacy, power, domination, and authority might arise.

Weber proposed three types of authority that can illustrate how systems become legitimate: traditional, charismatic, and rational-legal authority. These three ideal types which are now discussed link to Weber's work on social action (i.e. how individuals ascribe meaning to their lives) (Weber et al., 2012).

Traditional authority refers to a legitimate position characterised by Weber as “virtue by authority”. In other words, an obedience to authority because of dominating culture and traditions (Weber et al., 2012). Power in this type could have been established following a long-standing tradition. For example, Primogeniture was once common practice in farm succession; that is the farm is bequeathed to the oldest son. A farmer’s son has gained a position of power and become the legitimate decision-maker/owner/central figure of the farm businesses. This type of authority can be linked to Weber’s traditional social action, whereby individuals ascribe meanings to actions based upon traditional beliefs.

Charismatic authority relates to the persona of an individual. Weber argues this type allows individuals to be ‘set apart from ordinary men and treated as endowed with supernatural, superhuman, or at least specifically exceptional powers or qualities’ (Weber et al., 2012). Individuals here have gained power and become legitimate leaders through their charismatic behaviour. A farming example here could be an individual taking on an estate manager role of a large farm in a national park, through an individual’s behaviour and actions he or she has been able to satisfy or ‘charm’ the necessary stakeholders to gain this position of power. Charismatic authority can be linked to Weber’s affective social action, whereby the emotive state of an individual influences decisions and actions.

Finally, rational-legal types of authority are most accustomed to democratic contemporary societies. Authority and power are not dictated based on culture and traditions or personality traits of an individual. Instead, reason and logic are applied through a fair process to decide the most appropriate person to be in a position of power. For example, an elderly farmer retires from farming and rather than giving the farm to his eldest son (tradition), he decides to let his two daughters farm the land as they are both seeking careers in the agricultural sector. This is the most rational choice in the situation. Rational-legal authority can be linked to Weber’s goal-rational social

action, whereby decisions and means of achieving something, a farm strategy for example, are based upon the most efficient way of meeting a goal.

Type of authority	Definition	Example
Traditional	Power and authority is legitimised based upon existing customs or traditions.	The eldest son inherits the estate. He inherits the farm and all its assets and becomes the decision-maker.
Charismatic	Power is obtained predominantly through personality traits.	A new entrant into farming secures a farm tenancy agreement on an upland farm. He used his own charisma to satisfy the landlord of his ability to run the farm.
Rational-legal	Reason and logic is applied through a democratic and fair process to determine who should be in a state of power.	A succession plan is created. The middle child receives the farm as it is a career that they want to pursue. The other children receive some property and finances.

Table 5.1.2 Ideal Types of Legitimacy

Table 5.1.2 above provides some simple definitions and examples of the different types of authority. While Weber's discussions around authority and legitimacy are generally in the context of analyses of political regimes, these discussions can be applied to power and authority within organisations and business settings. Issues around legitimacy are identified and discussed later in the thesis. Many farmers appear to be in battles of legitimation to gain power in relationships and exercise more control in the farming enterprise. For example, female farmers are questioned around operating in a male-dominated industry (Section 7.2.1). Young farmers are often involved in power struggles, trying to gain more authority in the farming business (Section 7.2.2). Farmers from non-farming backgrounds (i.e., outsiders) are often

perceived as not ‘proper farmers’ and struggle to be taken seriously in the local farming community (Section 7.2.3). Thus, legitimation forms a significant part in other concepts, such as decision-making and control, which are explored later in the thesis in relation to farm business strategies.

Finally, it could be said that pursuing this PhD has been a somewhat road to legitimacy in trying to demonstrate my expertise in the field of rural entrepreneurship. McElwee (2008:139) nicely phrases this as ‘making the transition from unknowing to knowing [fool]’. Indeed, there are certain transformational experiences that I have embarked upon on this road to obtain a doctorate. I can thus see the PhD process as a process of legitimation, a journey from the unknown to the known, from transforming from a farmer (i.e., an outsider to academia) to becoming an insider within the walls of the so-called ‘ivory tower’ (Gittins, 2021b). While ideal types of authority have already been introduced in this section, as have ideal types of business strategies in the literature review (Section 3.3.2), the importance of the conceptual tool itself has yet to be discussed.

### 5.1.3 Ideal Types

Weber (1963:393) defines an ideal type:

‘An ideal type is formed by the one-sided accentuation of one or more points of view and by the synthesis of a great many diffuse, discrete, more or less present and occasionally absent concrete individual phenomena, which are arranged according to those one sidedly emphasized viewpoints into a unified analytical construct.’

An ideal type is a presentation of an abstract concept. Ideal types are streamlined and simplified versions of reality. Models are formed based upon certain characteristics of



empirical reality (Swedberg, 2018a). Much of what Weber presents are in the form of ideal types, such as ideal types of authority, social action and bureaucracy. However, when constructing ideal types, social scientists need to be aware that it is their construction and interpretation of reality. Still, it is not empirical reality and ideal types should not be treated as such (Swedberg, 2018).

Earlier in the literature review, it was shown how McElwee (2008) constructed various ideal types of farmers, including: entrepreneurial farmers, farmer as farmers, contractors and rural entrepreneurs, not farmers. McElwee created these ideals to compare the entrepreneurial nature of farmers to conventional farmers, helping him develop a conceptual understanding of 'the farmer as an entrepreneur'. Similar principles are applied in this study (chapter eight), creating ideal types of farmers, farm businesses and the types of strategies used by farmers to respond to the realities in the sector. The ideal type of analysis highlights heterogeneity amongst English upland farmers and extending existing farmer typology frameworks in the literature (McElwee, 2008). Ideal types are used to theorize and discuss the theoretical aspects of this work, helping to provide a sufficient conceptualization of farmers as entrepreneurs and strategists. Now that some central Weberian concepts have been discussed, attention can be given to the rationale for drawing upon Weber's work.

#### 5.1.4 Why Weber?

There are many different theorists and theories which potentially could underpin this study. This section argues specifically why the work of Weber is used. Many of the theoretical concepts identified in chapter three also have a strong resemblance to the work of Weber, such as Institutional Entrepreneurship and constrained entrepreneurship (de Bruin and Dupious, 2003). In *The Protestant Ethic* (1905), Weber wrote about the power institutional systems have over individuals lives, I found his

work meaningful and feel great affinity to his work. In particular, I share his cynicism regarding bureaucratic and administrative control within modern organisations. Perhaps this view is influenced by my positionality, personally experiencing much of the government 'red tape' restrictions in farming and I feel it is fitting looking at his work in the context of constrained entrepreneurship.

Moreover, the inclusion of a Weberian theoretical underpinning aligns with the qualitative methodological approach adopted. For example, Weber's *verstehen* approach aligns with my own interpretative/social constructionist philosophical views outlined in chapter six. Burrell and Morgan (1979) argue functionalists hold an objective view of reality, and have opposing ontological, epistemological, axiological and rhetorical views to those investigating subjective phenomena. Verstehen is rooted in Symbolic Interactionism, a theoretical approach present in Weber's work which is centred around the idea of analysing society through its subjective meanings (Blumer, 1969). Symbolic interactionists argue individuals ascribe certain subjective meanings to everyday life which cannot be analysed sufficiently through objectivity (Mead, 1934; Blumer, 1969). It is evident that the characteristics of the concept are prominent in Weber's interpretive sociology. Blumer (1969) outlines three principles for symbolic interactionism: meaning, language and thinking which are central to Weber's *verstehen*.

Symbolic interactionism is focused on the micro-level, looking at the relationships between individuals in society and how actors make sense of the world through meaning, language and interpretation. Therefore, symbolic interactionism can be deemed an appropriate theoretical approach that can be used in this study to explore the lived experiences of upland farmers. The incorporation of symbolic interactionism can be useful in helping me analyse both the subjective realities of farmers and take into consideration the material dimensions that impact them in their daily lives (Claxton and Murray, 1994). The inter-changeability model below (figure 5.4.1)

illustrates the complex nature of the social world, illustrating the relationships between actors (subjectivity), the material world (objectivity) and self-definition (identity) (Claxton and Murray, 1994).

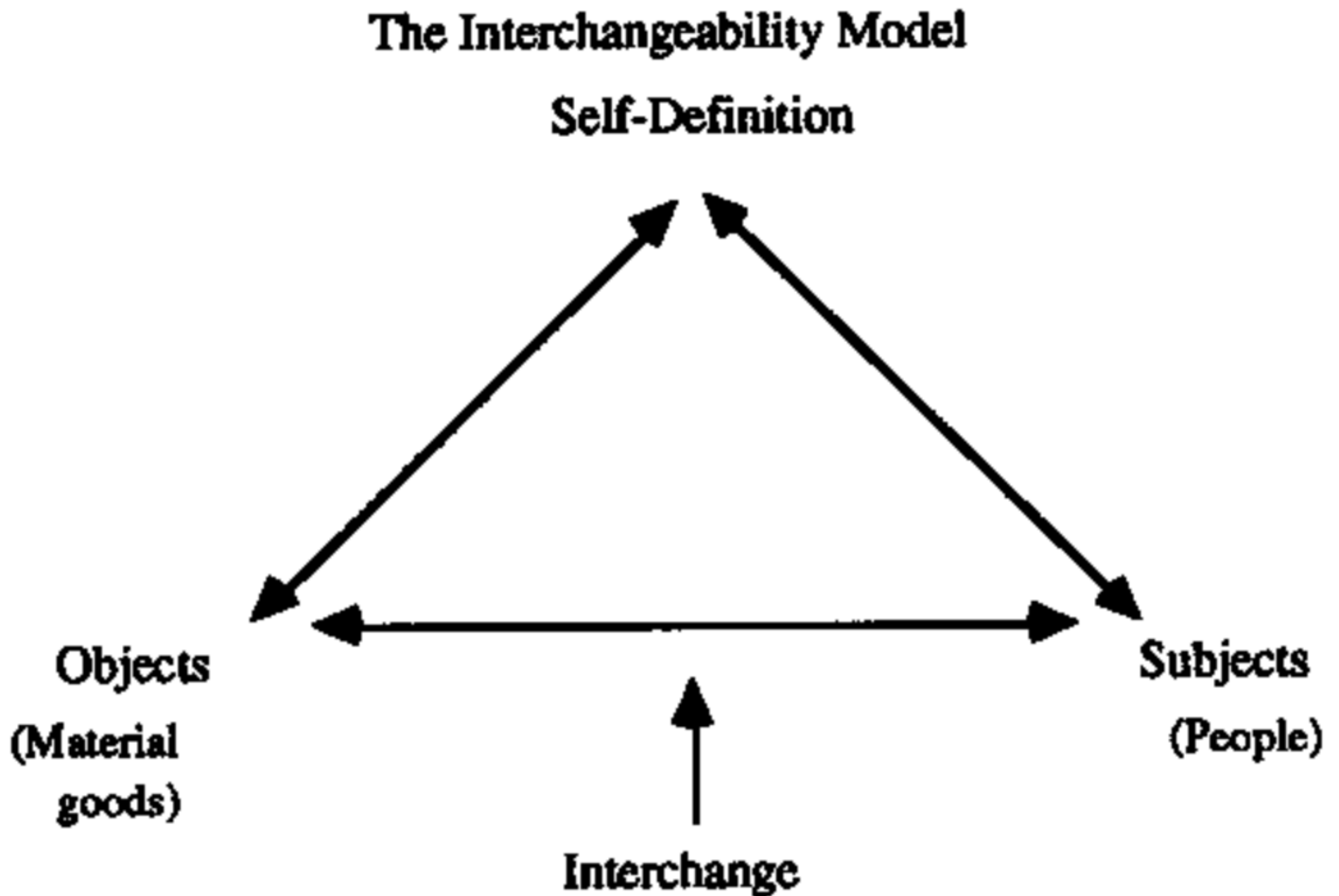


Figure 5.1.4 Incorporating Symbolic Interactionism

In other words, the social world is complex and I believe it is made up of both subjective experiences derived from social interaction, and the more material and physical dimensions. The interface between the material world, such as geography, topographical make-up and economic factors when mixed with the subjectivity of rural life (i.e, farming cultures) may influence how farmers construct (self-definition) their identities. Drawing on Weber's work, in particular verstehen and symbolic

interactionism, helps me understand how actors (i.e., farmers) subjectively experience reality in accordance with the material world they live in, such as responding to the harsh geographical terrains of the English uplands. It may also provide insight into how farmers construct [entrepreneurial] identities in response to the institutional and environmental factors.

Finally, one point on the inclusion of Weber is that a PhD aims to provide an original contribution to knowledge, which can be made in several ways: empirical, methodological or theoretical (Wilkins et al., 2019). The work of Weber has not been utilised sufficiently in the context of upland farm management research. Other rural sociologists have used the work of Weber to investigate phenomena within agricultural contexts (Munters, 1972; Favareto, 2006; Waters, 2016). However, the work of Weber, specifically the iron cage metaphor, has not been applied to explore constrained entrepreneurship in an agricultural context. It can then be argued that the inclusion of Weber's work can assist in making a theoretical contribution to the rural management literature. Now a rationale for Weber has been discussed, his seminal work around the iron cage metaphor is introduced.

## 5.2 Introducing the Iron Cage

The iron cage metaphor is a sociological concept created by Max Weber. While Weber created the imagery in his book 'The Protestant Ethic and Spirit of Capitalism' (Protestant Ethic), it was Talcott Parsons who translated the German, *Stahlhartes Gehäuse*, to 'steel-hard housing (casing)'. This section aims to explore Weber's iron cage and present a personal interpretation of the imagery.

The iron cage metaphor is complex and difficult to understand. Douglass (2016) suggests there is a lack of clarity in understanding the metaphor:

‘people understand that the trap [Iron Cage] has something to do with the character of modern life... But it is not clear as to what that something is’ (Douglass, 2016: 505)

To address this issue, the iron cage metaphor can be interpreted as follows. Calvinism which previously rewarded individuals from remaining abstinent from worldly pleasures (i.e. the pursuit of material items) is now recognised by Weber as a fundamental part of modern capitalism. Capitalism, upheld by some forms of Christianity, is entrapping individuals in this metaphorical iron cage. The pursuit of profit through entrepreneurial venture is rewarded, machine production (mechanization, industrialization, rational behaviour) is the new norm that underpins modernity. Weber associated the modern spirit of capitalism or and the role of an entrepreneur with Benjamin Franklin:

‘Nevertheless, we provisionally use the expression spirit of (modern) capitalism to describe that attitude which seeks profit rationally and systematically in the manner which we have illustrated by the example of Benjamin Franklin’ (Weber, 2015: 27)

Actors in society are now encouraged to pursue a life of profit, individuals are born into this economic system of entrapment, unable to escape due to an irresistible force. Teleological efficiency, increasing rationalization and control, coupled by bureaucratic hierarchical structures entrap individuals in this metaphorical iron cage. Weber did not see any end to this without major socio-political change occurring: ‘perhaps it will so determine them until the last ton of fossilized coal is burnt’ (Weber, 2015: 181). Whilst Karl Marx saw capitalism as an irrational system and a precursor to communism, Weber views capitalism as an ever increasing iron cage which limits individual freedom through increasing rationalization (Löwy, 2007). Weber (2015:

181) references Baxter, a seventeenth century Puritan theologian, who argues materialistic goods 'only lie on the shoulders like a light cloak', with Weber in later passages arguing how materialism ascertains a certain power over individuals like no time in history before. Material goods are, therefore, symbolic of the new modernized society underpinned by rationale capitalism.

This powerful imagery of an iron cage can be analysed on several philosophical levels. The metaphor can be viewed as a product of institutionalism, formed from a bureaucratic social order and analysed at the societal (macro-environment) and organisational level (micro-level). This imagery is not too dissimilar to Rousseau's view of society, whereby 'man is born free, but he is everywhere in chains' (Najder, 1976). The cage could also be symbolic of individual entrapment, that the cage is contributing to a 'growing loss of freedom' in individuality. Only by being a part of bureaucratic organisations can individuals be a part of modern society, going against this system is met with irresistible force. Weber argued that only entrepreneurs, to a certain extent, can escape the iron cage which entraps society (Weber, 2015).

The iron cage imagery can also be analysed through Weber's political work 'The situation of the Bourgeois Democracy in Russia', whereby he regards the modernization of Russia and its population as a new form of Serfdom i.e., peasants under a feudalistic society (Weber, 1992). Weber is cynical of bureaucracy and modernisation, connotating modern Russian society with medieval feudalism. Weber argued life had become too complex, and that the spreading and tightening of capitalistic systems is seen as adverse to personal freedom' (Weber et al. 2012: 50). The argument put forth by Weber is that capitalism increasingly restricts individuals of their freedom. A quote from Weber himself summarises this well:

'Specialists without spirit, sensualists without heart; this nullity imagines that it has attained a level of civilization never before achieved' (Weber, 2015: 123).

This powerful imagery brings this study's theoretical underpinning to life, drawing upon the themes of the iron cage to investigate the constraints and challenges facing farmers. Specifically, the underpinning concepts of the iron cage metaphor, bureaucracy, rationalization and social action are now explored in greater depth.

### 5.2.1 Weberian Concepts

#### *Bureaucracy*

'The capitalistic entrepreneur is, in our society, the only type who has been to maintain at least a relative immunity from the subjection to the control of rational bureaucratic knowledge.' (Weber et al. 2012: 339).

The above quote summarises the cynical view Weber had towards bureaucracy and symbolises the powerful role it has in sustaining the iron cage. Weber argues that bureaucracy impedes over contemporary society, that all aspects of daily lives are becoming increasingly rationalised and that only entrepreneurs have some 'relative immunity from the subjection to the control of rational bureaucratic knowledge' (Weber et al. 2012: 339).

In *Economy and Society*, Weber writes that the modern bureaucratic organisation is the most efficient way of enforcing rationality. Weber's view of bureaucracy implies it could be a constraint to how people run their businesses. In this research, views of bureaucracy are explored, understanding farmer attitudes and the extent to which it might be constraining, or even perhaps facilitating, to entrepreneurial activity. This notion of bureaucracy aligns with some of the key themes identified in the literature review, such as de Bruin's and Dupuis's (2000) 'constrained entrepreneurship'.

Bureaucracy is a central concept in the iron cage and, therefore, should be explored further in the context of farmers.

### *Rationalization*

‘Imagine the consequences of that comprehensive bureaucratization and rationalization which already today we see approaching... By it, the performance of each individual worker is mathematically measured, each man becomes a little cog in the machine, and, aware of this, his one preoccupation is to become a bigger cog’ (Weber, 1990).

Rationality is a central concept in the cage metaphor and is present across much of Weber’s work, with scholars terming it the iron cage of rationality (ICR) (McElwee and Refai, 2019). Weber writes of the ‘rational character’ who conducts his business affairs in a manner to achieve maximum results through the most efficient means. Freedman (2015:462) discusses how rationalization played a fundamental role in the rise of the ‘management class’ in the early twentieth century, stating:

‘The more a worker could be treated as an unthinking machine the better, because without the complication of independent thought it would be possible to calculate how best to extract optimal performance.’

The role of rationalization can be explored within the context of this thesis, understanding how rationally minded upland farmers are in their responses to the challenges in the sector. Moreover, it can be used to understand the extent in which Weber’s ICR is applicable to the worldviews of upland farmers, understanding if increasing rationalization in the farming sector is a constraint.

### *Social action*



‘Sociology is a science which attempts the interpretative understanding of social action in order thereby to arrive at a casual explanation of its courses and effects. In ‘action’ is included all human behaviour when and in so far the acting individual attaches a subjective meaning to it’ (Weber et al., 2012: 44).

This definition by Weber defines sociology as a means of interpretatively understanding social action. Weber creates four ideal types of social action:

1. ‘Zweckrational’ (means ends). The most efficient and rationale means of achieving an end result.
2. ‘Wertrational’ (Value-rational). A rational action which involves a conscious belief in absolute values i.e. ethical reasons, religious.
3. Affective social action. Influenced by the emotional state of an individual, i.e. revenge.
4. Traditional social action. The way things have always been done i.e. culture

Weber argues that contemporary society is undergoing increasing rationalization (ICR), with entrepreneurs and business owners favouring *zweckrational* social action in favour of other forms of social action. This increasing rationalization links to key management theorists, such as Taylor’s (2004) scientific management approach and Adam Smith’s (1937) division of labour, whereby human labour under a capitalist system is highly efficient to maximise output (Freedman, 2015). However, with this increasing rationalization, other types of social action in the workplace and wider society are erased, forcing individuals to work specialised roles and, often, unfilled lives inside the ICR (Alexander, 2013). Weber emphasised that increasing rationalization and bureaucratic control is ignorant of human emotions, and a society orientated towards the removal of other forms of social action has led to meaning being removed from the world in favour of rational choice.

These underpinning concepts (i.e., bureaucracy, rationalization and social action) form the iron cage and provide a novel theoretical lens to look at farmers' constraints and challenges. By seeking to understand, explore and apply the features of Weber's ICR, a theoretical lens is formed to analyse constrained entrepreneurship (de Bruin and Dupious, 2003) in the English uplands. It will provide a lens to analyse farmers, their enterprise activities and the context they operate within, providing insight into upland farm business management practices. Exploring these Weberian concepts will be useful in helping to understand how farmers create farm business strategies in response to the institutional challenges within the sector. Thus, providing a theoretical framing to explore the research questions sufficiently identified in chapter three.

The inclusion of Weber's work builds upon the lack of theoretical underpinning in rural studies (Suess-Reyes and Fuetsch, 2016) and offers a theoretical contribution by applying an underexplored sociological lens in the context of rural research. Weberian underpinning will allow insight into how upland farmers respond strategically and entrepreneurially to the realities facing the sector. However, several authors have criticised the cage metaphor, and these criticisms should be acknowledged if the ICR is used as a dominant theoretical underpinning.

Undeniably, theory forms a valuable contribution of this work. Exactly how theory is used throughout this thesis is now discussed in the next section.

### 5.3 Theory

The purpose of this section is to justify the inclusion of Weber's work as a theoretical underpinning in this thesis. First, the term 'theory' is defined in relation to qualitative research, understanding how theory will be used in this thesis. Second, types of

theories are introduced, critically discussing how the inclusion of Weber will offer a theoretical contribution. Finally, the use of theory is discussed in rural/farm management research, presenting how Weber can be utilised in the context of upland farming.

### 5.3.1 What is Theory and How is it Used?

Theory is important in this research, which is why a full section is dedicated to the selection of an appropriate lens which will support the research aim. However, theory is often poorly defined and understood, so it is vital to be clear on what theory means and how it can be incorporated into the thesis.

The term 'theory' is vague, messy and complicated to comprehend (Sandberg and Alvesson, 2021). Theory can be socially constructed and defined in different ways by different people, which makes claiming a theoretical contribution especially tricky as its meanings can be relative to individual interpretations (Stewart et al., 2011). Theory can take on multiple meanings across disciplines, according to Sandberg and Alvesson (2021) 'explanatory theories' (i.e. those theories which seek to explain phenomena) are generally the most used and often accepted as the only form of theory. However, in the context of business and management studies, organizational phenomena are messy and difficult to grasp, whereby often scholars must go beyond explaining why a phenomena might be occurring. Sandberg and Alvesson (2021) identify five types of theories present within organisational studies: Explaining, comprehending, ordering, enacting and provoking. In this work, I theorise primarily through comprehending and ordering theory.

'Comprehending' is commonly associated with interpretative traditions and qualitative methodologies (aligning with this work), with scholars trying to grasp the

meanings of a certain phenomenon under analysis (Sandberg and Alvesson, 2021). Blumer (1954:3) regards comprehending theory as ‘develop[ing] a meaningful interpretation of the social world, or some significant part of it ... so that people may have a clearer understanding of their world’. This is what I am doing, entering the multiple realities of farmers, trying to understand the phenomena of farm entrepreneurship and approaches to strategic management in their responses to the challenges facing them. To comprehend theory and view these theoretical constructs in practice, I have drawn upon a multi-methods approach, leveraging my position as an ‘industry insider’ to enter different farmer worldviews. I am trying to comprehend the challenges facing upland farmers, using Weber’s iron cage metaphor to look at potential constraints to farm entrepreneurship.

I have also engaged in what Sandberg and Alvesson (2021) term ‘ordering theory’ throughout this work. The creation of Weberian influenced ideal types in the findings chapter and classifying farmers interviewed in relation to theoretical concepts and demographic features, such as in the Upland Farmer Segmentation Framework, are examples of ordering theory. I created conceptually pure ideal types of farmers, farm businesses and their strategies which can be contrasted with the much more complex and murky empirical realities occurring in their social lives. Ordering theories into models, typologies, and frameworks has helped promote conceptual order and clarity in this thesis, such as understanding the complexities involved in farming levels that span across the FSF features.

By placing a strong emphasis on theory within this research, I have been able to build upon the shortfalls around a ‘strong lack of theoretical underpinning’ commonly found within the rural studies and farm entrepreneurship research (Suess-Reyes and Fuetsch, 2016). With this lack of theoretical underpinning in the rural studies research, it is unsurprising that Weber’s metaphor of the iron cage has not been used in farm entrepreneurship research. Indeed, many scholars have argued an overall

disconnection between academic theory and management practice (Lee and Greenley, 2010; Crespín-Mazet and Ingemansson-Havenvid, 2021). Through an empirical study utilising a multi-methods approach, I have been able to demonstrate a connection between academic theory and practice, identifying relevant theories, themes and concepts from the literature review and exploring their relevance in the context of upland farm business management, shifting from theory to practice in an abductive manner. These links between theory and methodology are further discussed in chapter six. The following section summarises how theory has been used in the context of farm management research.

### 5.3.2 Theory in Farming Studies

This sub-section explores the use of theory in farm management research, suggesting how the inclusion of Weber in a study on farmers can aid in making an original contribution to knowledge.

Suess-Reyes et al. (2016) claim that there is a general lack of theoretical underpinning in farm management research. She analysed 53 articles on farm strategies and found only nine authors explicitly cited a theoretical lens, none of which used classical sociological theorists like Weber, Marx and Durkheim to explore rural phenomena. Gill and Johnson (2010) suggest researchers who do not incorporate a theoretical lens into their research designs, are at risk in being too descriptive in their analysis. Suess-Reyes et al. (2016) suggests that rural studies scholars need to support future research with strong theoretical underpinnings. This thesis performs this by including a robust theoretical underpinning to explore the realities facing upland farmers.

The main theories which rural researchers cite are Barney's (1996) RBV, Coase's (1937) Theory of the Firm and Bourdieu's (1986) cultural capital (Schultz, 1939; Grande, 2011;

Glover, 2013). However, there are some clear limitations in using any of these theories in this research. Rural scholars have extensively used RBV in farm-based studies (Alsos and Carter, 2006; Grande, 2011; Suess-Reyes and Fuetsch, 2016). However, RBV's inclusion in this study would be poorly justified due to the focus of the theory being on how actors interact with resources. A theoretical lens needs to be selected that extends beyond an analysis of how farmers use resources but allows for explaining the realities facing upland farmers.

Likewise, Coase's (1937) 'Theory of the Firm' underpins many studies in the discipline of agricultural economics (Schultz, 1939; Johnson, 1972; Williamson, 2002; Alsos and Carter, 2006). However, the Theory of the Firm is fundamentally an economic theory, thus, using this as a theoretical lens would mean that the farm and farmer activities would be viewed through an economic lens. This study is not limited to only exploring the economic challenges facing upland farmers, but also explores the social and environmental pressures impacting farmers and their businesses. Therefore, the theory of the firm cannot be used.

Several authors have generated new knowledge into farm management practices by applying sociological concepts (McElwee, 2008b; Burton et al. 2008; Stuart et al. 2012; Mohanty, 2013). Glover's (2013) application of Bourdieu's capital theory, coupled with a qualitative research design, allowed insights to be gained into family farm succession and business survival. Therefore, it can be argued that sociological theories and qualitative research designs can provide sufficient analysis into the complexities relating to farmers and their enterprises (McElwee, 2008b). Weber's iron cage metaphor, underpinned with the philosophical concepts of *verstehen* and symbolic interactionism, will form a theoretical underpinning in this study to explore the constraining factors facing farmers (de Bruin and Dupious, 2000). The iron cage metaphor is now introduced.

## 5.4 Criticisms of the iron cage

This section aims to critically analyse Weber's iron cage, analysing different criticisms before presenting my own adaptation of the ICR. Weber's original metaphor is criticised, providing an alternative view of three ideal types which are later explored in the empirical phase and applied to the constraints and challenges facing upland farmers (chapter eight).

Baehr (2001) argues that Parsons iron cage is an inadequate and misleading translation of Weber's original meaning, rather, 'Steel Shell' should be used, suggesting steel reflects modernity better than iron, with steel being a product of human fabrication. Parsons coining of the term 'iron cage' has also faced criticisms regarding his own fundamentally functionalist philosophical positioning. Bottomore (1978) states that 'functionalism has become an embarrassment in contemporary theoretical sociology', suggesting that Parson's own translation of the Protestant Ethic could misconstrue Weber's own interpretative sociological views, thereby distorting the iron cage metaphor.

Perhaps one of the most obvious criticisms of the iron cage is its applicability in contemporary society, which differs quite substantially to the days of Weber. In modern society, Weber argued that capitalism no longer needs to be upheld by monistic religion, rather a new spirit of capitalism exists: 'it no longer needs the support of any religion to influence economic life (Weber, 2015: 34)'. It could be argued that this argument still holds true today. However, whilst clearly there are examples in organisations of excessive bureaucratization, Boltanski et al. (2005) challenges Weber's cynical view of capitalism in contemporary society, arguing that post-1970 capitalism began to transition to a point whereby managers almost became hero-type figures, such as leaders in entrepreneurship and innovation, engaging in creativity and working towards not only economic goals, but solving societal and

environmental challenges. The interpretation presented by Boltanski et al. (2005) is very different to Weber's more cynical view of bureaucracy and institutional order. Some scholars have commented on Weber's ICR as being too critical of modern bureaucracy, omitting the benefits which bureaucratic control brings to organisations and people's lives. Briscoe (2007) discusses some positives of bureaucracy within organisations, framing it as a shield as opposed to a cage that offers protection for employees from the demands of the workplace. Moreover, Ritzer et al. (2018) offer another cage alteration, introducing the 'velvet cage', which protects those who reside within. Ritzer argues that some people love being inside this comfortable cage, whereby the current institutional conditions are protective them from certain harsh realities (Ritzer et al. 2018). Thus, the cage can be perceived as protective and privileging.

In other work, the cage appears to be more neutral, flexible and fluid in nature (Klagge, 1997; Ritzer, 2011; McElwee and Refai, 2019). For example, Klagge (1997) offers three perspectives for analysing the cage: positive, negative and neutral. First, the cage can be interpreted as a 'prerequisite structure', an essential function of modern society (Klagge, 1997: 66). It is similar to Briscoe's (2007) view, whereby it is a necessity in modern life which brings positives at the societal, organisational and personal level, such as: job security, consistent quality, best practice and predictability. Second, the cage can be viewed as a prison, exercising power, control and regulation over those inside, leading to 'Intellectual Stultification' of prisoners (Weber, 1994: 71). In this type, democracy is lessened, organisations hold power from a top-down authoritarian perspective and meaning is omitted from an individual's life. This ideal can be related to Weber's concept of disenchantment, alongside Marx's alienation in the workplace (Löwy, 2007). Finally, Klagge's (1997) third alteration is that the cage is neutral, relating the metaphor to the 'monkey bars' apparatus in a children's playground. The metaphor here is the cage (monkey bars) can produce both positives and negatives to society, it all depends on who is using the apparatus. Organisations



can use bureaucratic structures for good, such as for the protection of worker rights and achieving organisational consistency, or bureaucratic structures can be damaging, such as by stifling creativity and creating a disenchantment in the workplace.

Ritzer's (2011) iron cage adaption, what he calls the 'McDonalidization of society' also shows how the metaphor can be illustrated in contemporary society by applying the concept of rationalization to examples of modern life. For example, Ritzer highlights how home-cooked meals have been replaced with sixty-second microwave dinners, arguing that whilst quick meals are both efficient and economical, traditions such as spending time with the family are lost in this rationalisation process. He argues rationalization has advanced beyond the workplace and spilled over into the day to day lives of everyone. Though, Ritzer (2011) terms it as a 'rubber cage', implying to a certain extent people still have a choice, where those privileged enough can bend the rubber bars and maintain other types of social action.

Type of cage	Cage Characteristics
Prison (Klagge, 1997; Weber, 2001)	<p>The classic Weberian Iron Cage. One views the cage as restrictive in nature similar to a prison.</p> <p>Individuals inside accept they are trapped and do not attempt to leave the cage.</p> <p>Bureaucracy is generally perceived negatively.</p>
Velvet/Shield (Ritzer, 2018)	<p>The cage offers protection for its inhabitants. Actors inside have no intention of ever leaving the cage.</p> <p>bureaucracy is mostly good. It enables one to pursue the life they want.</p> <p>They fear the outside world. Over time the velvet material inside the cage deteriorates.</p>

Rubber (Ritzer)	At first glance the bars appear metallic but are in fact rubber. The cage is neutral. Bureaucracy is both positive and negative to those inside the cage.
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Table 5.3: “Types of Cages

As evidenced above (table 5.4), the cage can be interpreted relatively depending upon how one views it. The first type in this adaptation is synonymous with Weber’s iron cage and Klagge’s (1997) cage as a prison. Here the cage is perceived negatively by its inhabitants. Bureaucracy and regulation may be interpreted as a powerful and constraining force that prevents entrepreneurial activity. Inhabitants are restricted in what they can do; they accept and conform to these institutional rules and never leave the cage. Individuals may possess an external LoC (Lefcourt, 1991), meaning they are not interested in overcoming these constrained factors, or simply cannot overcome them.

The second type contrasts with Klagge’s view of the iron cage as a prison. This adaptation is influenced by Ritzer’s et al. (2018) notion of the ‘velvet cage’, alongside Briscoe’s (2007) iron shield of protection. Here, inhabitants of this cage are living inside comfortably, current institutional conditions shield certain individuals. However, it is important to remember that whilst some may live comfortably within the velvet cage, institutional changes do occur, forcing business owners to alter strategies to sustain competitiveness.

Finally, Ritzer’s rubber cage is presented in a more neutral manner. Metaphorically speaking, at first glance inhabitants perceive this cage to be no different to Weber’s iron cage, but at closer inspection the iron prison bars are actually made from rubber, and inhabitants of the cage can bend the bars and escape. Weber et al. (2012: 339) suggests how entrepreneurs are one of the few types of people in society who can

withstand, to some extent, the restrictions of the cage; 'The capitalistic entrepreneur is, in our society, the only type who has been able to maintain at least relative immunity from subjection to the control of rational bureaucratic knowledge'. Those more entrepreneurially orientated may possess an internal LoC and other trait-based entrepreneurial characteristics (Carland et al., 1988; Lefcourt, 1991) to overcome the institutional conditions.

This section has presented three adaptations of Weber's ICR based upon its criticisms. These adaptations are investigated in the empirical phase of the thesis, exploring the notion of 'constrained entrepreneurship' in the upland farm sector and helping to explain the realities facing farmers. Symbolic interactionism and *verstehen* are core ideas used to understand this, ascribing meaning behind the farm business strategies in place to respond to the realities in the sector. Indeed, later in the thesis, the features of the cage metaphor are shown to be linked to the constraints facing farmers (Chapter eight, section 8.2).

## 5.4 Chapter Summary

Literature Review Concepts: Entrepreneurship			Weberian Concepts		Research Phenomenon
Institutional Entrepreneurship, Family Entrepreneurship, Entrepreneurial Identity	Spatial Context, Bricolage, Informal Entrepreneurship	Constrained Entrepreneurship	The 'Iron' Cages (Adapted Framework)		What Strategies are English Upland Farmers Using to Respond to the Realities in the Beef and Sheep Sector?
Literature Review Concepts: Strategic Management			Bureaucracy	Social Action	
Strategic Thinking Capabilities	Strategic Entrepreneurship	Decision Making, Competitive Environment, Agility.	Rationalization	Power and Domination	

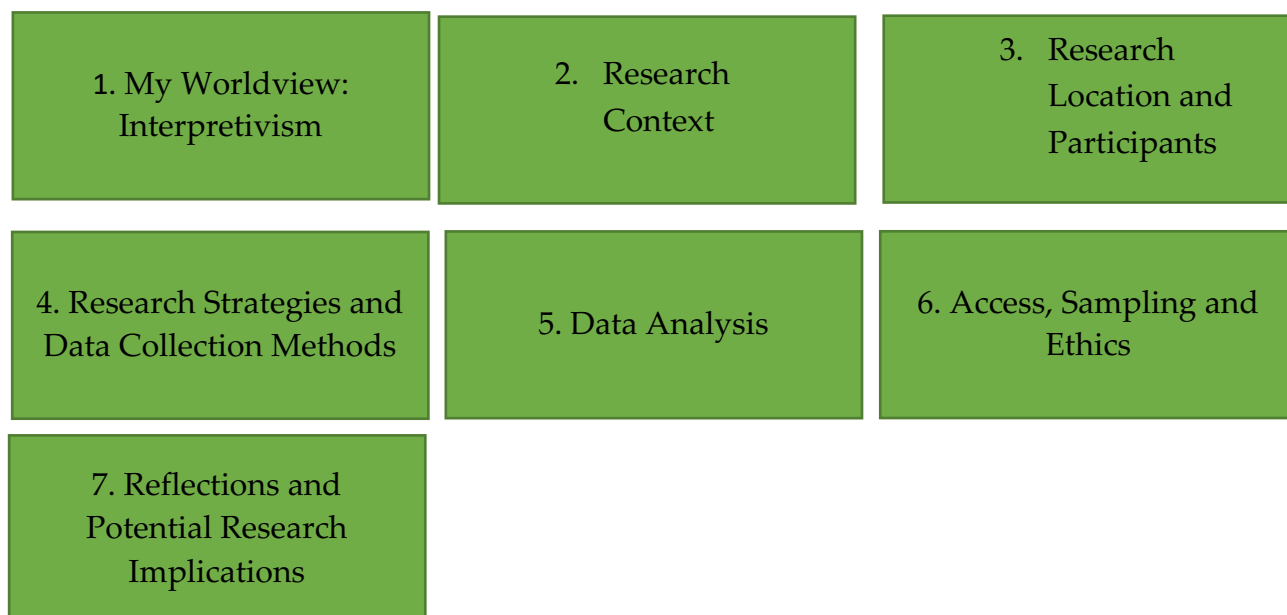
Figure 5.4 Theoretical Framework (Author Generated)

In summary, this chapter has presented how Weber's iron cage is utilised in the context of upland farming. Weber's work has not been sufficiently applied in farm-based research, suggesting a theoretical contribution can be made by providing new insights into upland farm management. Figure 5.3 above illustrates how Weber's iron cage metaphor connects to the theories, themes and concepts identified in chapter three, suggesting that an exploration of such themes in regard to Weber's work helps investigate the overarching research question while providing a sound theoretical underpinning (Suess-Reyes and Fuetsch, 2016).

This Weberian underpinning allows me to meet the research questions and objectives. Specifically, the iron cage metaphor and its adaptations are later discussed in relation

to some entrepreneurship and strategic management concepts to answer RQ2: 'How might the challenges facing English upland beef and sheep farmers constrain entrepreneurial activity?' Indeed, Weber has a lot to offer me on a personal level and this incorporation of theory feels right, if I am to put this subjectively. Because of the qualitative exploratory nature of this study, using Weber's work, underpinned by verstehen and symbolic interactionism, allows for the subjective exploration of farmer worldviews. I can see a link between this choice of theory and my own philosophical values, which are discussed further in the next chapter.

## Chapter Six: Methodology chapter



### 6.0 Introduction

‘Methodology can never be more than a self-reflection on the means that have proved useful in practice’ (Weber, 1949:115).

The quote by Max Weber nicely indicates what will be considered in this chapter. I provide a justification for and self-reflection on the methodology used to answer the study’s research questions. This research makes a methodological contribution to the farm entrepreneurship literature by utilising my ‘industry insider’ positionality. An interpretative/social constructionist approach underpins this methodology. Few papers reflect on the methodological processes when conducting qualitative research within farming contexts (McElwee, 2008a). Whilst a select few papers using interpretative approaches exist (Smith et al., 2020), methodological issues are ill discussed and not from the perspective of an industry insider. A methodological contribution can be made in this regard.

This chapter is structured as follows. First, I present an overview of several research paradigms in social science research before discussing my own worldview. I also outline some philosophical influences that have led to adopting an interpretative paradigm and a qualitative methodology (Section 6.1). Second, the research context, questions and design are introduced, detailing my position and motivation to undertake this study, whilst outlining the research design used to answer the study's research questions (Section 6.2). Third, the research sites and participants are introduced, providing a justification for their inclusion (Section 6.3). Fourth, the research strategies and data collection tools used to answer the research questions are presented, justifying why a mixture of phenomenology, ethnography and case studies are used in combination with in-depth interviews, *ad-hoc* conversations, visual methods, and an ongoing research diary (Section 6.4). Fifth, a justification is provided as to why thematic analysis is used as an analytical technique (Section 6.5). Discussions also follow around why Weberian influenced typologies and case studies are used in an abductive manner to present the qualitative research data. Section six discusses issues relating to data access, sampling techniques and ethics (Section 6.6). Finally, I provide a personal reflection on the research process itself, discussing some research implications around this qualitative methodology (Section 6.7).

## 6.1 My worldview: Interpretivism

In this section, I outline my own philosophical assumptions which underpin this work. First, I briefly present an overview of some of the worldviews underpinning social science research. Second, I outline my own ontological, epistemological, and axiological assumptions, providing a rationale for selecting an interpretative paradigm. Third, I provide a conceptualisation of how I view the research process and discuss my philosophical influences, which have influenced my worldview.

### 6.1.1 Worldviews

A worldview, synonymous with the terms paradigm or research philosophy, can be defined as a ‘basic belief system or world-view that guides the investigation’ (Guba and Lincoln, 1994: 105). Research philosophies influence the decisions we make throughout the research process (Bell et al., 2018). Within social science research, there are several established research philosophies used by social scientists to investigate various research phenomena. These paradigms include but are not limited to positivism, interpretivism and pragmatism (Rehman and Alharthi, 2016). These paradigms are now briefly outlined and discussed (table 6.1.1 below).

Philosophical Assumptions	Interpretivism	Positivism	Pragmatism
Ontology	Multiple realities exist, relative to individuals. Underpinned by relativism.	Reality is structured, functional and orderly. It exists independently to the researcher.	Focuses on finding a practical solution.
Epistemology	Reality is socially constructed through subjective meanings. Verstehen	Observational laws, facts and numbers can be used to hypothesise and discover phenomena.	Select ‘the best’ tools and techniques to acquire knowledge. Not restricted to certain paradigms.
Axiology	Value-laden. The researcher is	Value-free. Researchers	Both subjective and objectives roles can



	part of the research process and is not separated.	remain objective and aim to eliminate bias from the research process.	be adopted at different points in the research process.
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Table 6.1.1 overview of research paradigms

To summarise, ontology refers to the nature of reality, asking those fundamental questions about the world that we live in (Guarino et al., 2009), such as what is the nature of reality? Epistemology refers to how knowledge is created and acquired, alongside whether knowledge is deemed to be acceptable or not (Gill and Johnson, 2010). In other words, it is about understanding what constitutes as acceptable knowledge. In contrast, axiology refers to the researcher's values in the research process (Saunders et al., 2019).

Positivism is a paradigm commonly associated with researchers who use quantitative research methods and is centred around the concept of objectivity (Crotty, 1998). Positivists believe that reality is orderly, external and can be measured, absolute truth exists and is awaiting discovery (Bryant, 1985). Epistemologically speaking, researchers create and validate knowledge using observable measures, numbers, and facts to attempt to prove or disprove a hypothesis (Burrell and Morgan, 1979). Positivists try to be consciously aware of their own role within the research process, trying to remain detached and value-free from the phenomena observed and attempting to eliminate bias (Crotty, 1998).

Whereas interpretivism differs from positivism, its associated ontology is focused on subjectivity, as opposed to objectivity. Interpretivists believe in multiple realities created through the social construction's humans create in their daily lives (Crotty,

1998). Epistemologically, knowledge is acquired through interactions with participants, sharing stories, accounts and artefacts with individuals and trying to decipher meaning behind what is being said (Bryman and Bell, 2015). The subjective nature of interpretivism allows researchers to become closer to the research phenomenon, being open with participants about their own philosophical assumptions and, in some methodologies with researchers becoming a part of what is being researched (Pulla and Human, 2018). Researchers may adopt a value-laden approach under an interpretative paradigm.

Pragmatism focuses on the practical research output, using a range of theories, concepts and techniques to create 'practical consequences in specific contexts' (Saunders et al., 2019:151). Pragmatists acknowledge that there are multiple ways of conducting research, any approaches can be undertaken so long as they lead towards a practical solution to a problem, a researcher should not be restricted to certain methods just because they are associated with a particular worldview. Instead, pragmatic researchers use various data collection and analytical techniques to meet the study's research questions and/or hypothesis. Mixed-methods designs are commonly used by pragmatists (Feilzer, 2010). In the following section, I provide a rationale for selecting an interpretative paradigm.

### 6.1.2 My Philosophical Assumptions

Regarding my ontology, I see the world as being constructed of multiple realities, relative to individual experiences. I do not view 'organisations as real just like physical objects' (Saunders et al., 2019: 161), rather I view the social world as a complex phenomenon, comprised of meanings, interpretations and multiple realities. Looking objectively at something, such as the removal of BPS, may show that farm businesses are economically struggling, however, often it will not show the extent in which these economic issues are impacting the business, but is ignorant of human emotion. For

me, the focus for methodological inquiry should be on exploring human interactions, going beyond objective analysis's and seeking to understand how material impacts are subjectively impacting individuals. 'Relativism' is a philosophical term underpinning my ontological view, 'it refers to the idea that there are many truths, an idea that some see promoted by the social constructionist assertion that all descriptions of realities are merely accounts and constructions', all of which are based around human interaction (Blanche et al., 2007: 283).

Social constructionism is an epistemological approach underpinning this work, alongside the philosophical concept and Weberian influenced *verstehen* and Blumer's symbolic interactionism (both discussed in chapter five, section 5.1.4). Social constructionist approaches are commonly integrated with a symbolic interactionism and phenomenological research design (Berger and Luckmann, 1991). Burr (2015: 23) states knowledge is socially constructed 'through the daily interactions between people in the course of social life'. The incorporation of this symbolic interactionist perspective with social constructionism is important for several reasons. Material dimensions are often unaccounted for in many interpretative studies which focus purely on subjective experiences (Keller, 2019). Symbolic interactionism helps move past this objective-subjective debate by focusing on the subjective experiences of farmers and incorporating materiality perspectives by exploring the meanings that individuals (farmers) attach to objects in the material world (Claxton and Murray, 1994). For example, access to finances (i.e., subsidies and grants) have a material impact and allow farmers to purchase various objects, such as tractors, barns, buildings, and livestock which in turn helps construct identities of farmers, relating to the theoretical concepts of entrepreneurial identity and self-identity (Goffman, 1978). This social constructionist/interactionist approach is applied in the context of this study. Farmers face an array of material challenges (i.e., topography, rural resources, ownership status) but experience them in relative and heterogeneous ways (McElwee, 2006a). Social constructionism is applied to understand these relative challenges

facing farmers, helping to understand how farmers respond to these relative challenges through various farm business strategies.

A methodological contribution to the farm entrepreneurship literature can be made by utilising this interpretative approach. It could be argued that the inclusion of more interpretative driven rural entrepreneurship studies is welcome. Packard (2017: 536) argues that 'the interpretivism paradigm has been neglected in modern entrepreneurship research', suggesting that positivist scholars have dominated prior research using quantitative research methods. Furthermore, McElwee (2008a:469) states there is little research using any 'social constructionist/interpretative approaches in the farm entrepreneurship literature'. Whilst McElwee's claim was made in 2008, it seems today that it still holds true, with more rural and farm entrepreneurship studies being conducted under pragmatist paradigms with mixed-methods research designs (Strijker et al., 2020).

Regarding my axiological positioning, a value-laden approach is adopted, leveraging the 'industry insider' positionality. As someone from within the upland/hill farming community, I may be considered an 'industry insider' instead of an 'industry outsider'. The theoretical concepts of 'involvement or detachment' (Lever and Powell, 2017) are also reflected in a methodological sense, which raises an axiological question which I should reflect on: How might an 'industry insider' approach impact the study?

The 'industry insider' approach is not well documented within the farm entrepreneurship literature. McElwee (2008b) comments on the methodological process of interviewing farmers, but little attention to the 'insider or outsider' approach is given. Kuehne (2016) reflects on his experiences of interviewing farmers, however not in the context of farm entrepreneurship. Kuehne (2016) suggests the

insider approach allows researchers to develop a deeper and clearer understanding of farming cultures.

Reflecting on Kuehne's (2016) comments, being an 'insider' has several advantages. I believe the farmers I interviewed view me as 'one of them', respecting that I am a farmer's son, living and working on an active hill farm and experience some of the realities they face, to them I am 'of the land'. This helped with the flow of conversations, we spoke a common language, farmers did not have to spend as long explaining things, and perhaps were less inclined to say things that aren't true. Margaret, a farmer I interviewed, mentioned this:

"You know what I'm talking about because we have common knowledge and a common vocabulary. But I can't get any sense from people outside the industry because I'm having to explain what I am meaning all the time."

An outsider may have to spend time learning common vocabulary, such as livestock husbandry terms and spend greater time in the field to experience what is going on. They may also have difficulty in gaining access to farmer participants. Being an 'industry insider' I am exposed to some of the realities in the sector through working and living on the family farm (See Gittins, 2021c). Therefore, I am able to sympathise and relate with farmers. There is also an element of trust involved, whereby farmers know I am not attempting to damage the industry and have no hidden agendas to destroy their livelihoods.

Moreover, it is appropriate to incorporate elements of data collection collected from this insider approach. As I am constantly immersed in the field, it is justifiable to use multiple methods to try and capture and present these realities within the thesis. Using solely one method (i.e., interviews) would be somewhat of a waste in my opinion, rather I should utilise my insider status to collect data that often arise at

serendipitous events to help answer the research question. However, I should be consciously aware of when I need to be involved and detached within the research process (Sinclair, 2015; Lever and Powell, 2017). The incorporation of a multi-methods design allows me to strike a balance between involvement and detachment. For example, when I am immersed in the field conversing with farmers or conducting a semi-structured interview I am actively involved. Keeping a research diary documenting my role within the study and reflecting on interview recordings allows me to become somewhat detached. In the following section, I discuss my worldviews further through a conceptualisation of the research process.

### 6.1.3 Conceptualising the research process and exploring my own philosophical influences

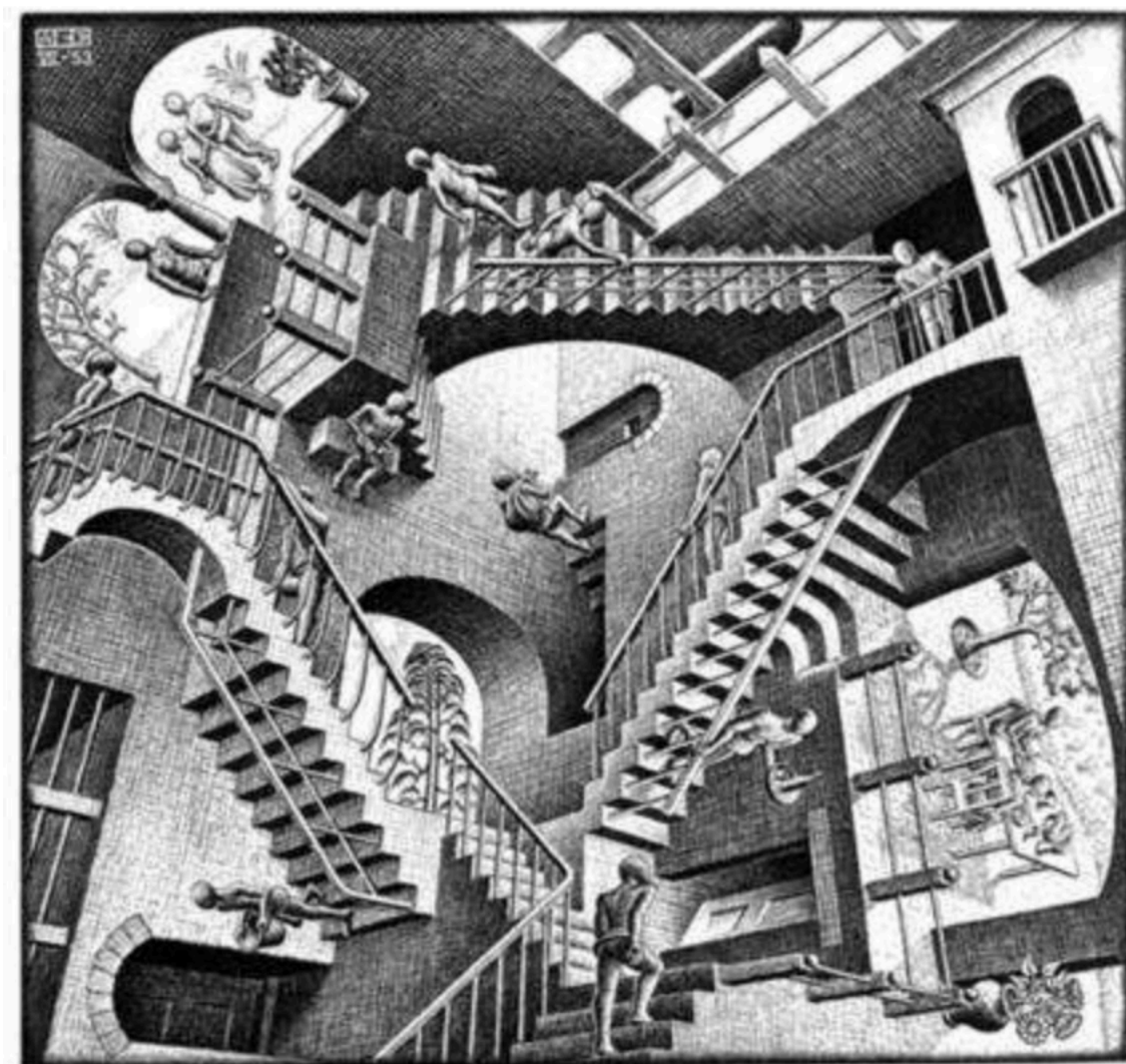


Figure 6.1.3 M. C. Escher (1953) 'Relativity'

It is the researcher's job to conjoin the elements of the thesis together into one coherent piece of work. I first begin by providing a conceptualisation of how I view the qualitative research process, before outlining some philosophical influences and discussing how the inclusion of a Weberian theoretical lens has also led to the adoption of an empirical research design. In the following sections, I link together my philosophical influences, which have led to an empirical research design, with the study's theoretical underpinning (i.e. Weber's iron cage).

Research can be a daunting, messy and complicated process. Figure 6.1.3 above is a lithograph titled 'Relativity' by M.C. Escher and symbolises aspects of the research process. It can be interpreted in various ways. It could be symbolic of the research journey a researcher must embark on, working through multiple components of the thesis (i.e. proposal, literature review, empirical work, data analysis, publishing *inter alia*). It could also be symbolic of the empirical part of this thesis, representative of the relative ontological position adopted, showing the multiple realities of the research participants. Each section could represent a farmer's world, it is my role as the researcher to enter, metaphorically speaking, these different worlds of farmers and understand from their point of view the challenges occurring in their daily lives. While a distinct research framework could be followed (i.e., Saunders et al 'Research Onion', 2020), arguably this would conflict with the exploratory nature of this research and might fit better with a positivistic approach. Instead, these research choices were reflected on throughout the research process, these choices are discussed throughout this chapter.

Regarding my philosophical influences, I have always been interested in philosophy, one text which had an impact on me is Plato's 'Republic' (Bloom and Kirsch, 2016). Despite it being written almost 2500 years ago in another language, in a space and place that has little resemblance to contemporary society, it raises many philosophical questions still debated today, such as morality, ethics, and justice. In this book, several analogies and metaphors prompted me to critically reflect on my own approaches to research philosophy. The 'parable of the cave' made me think deeply about how reality can be perceived differently by individuals.



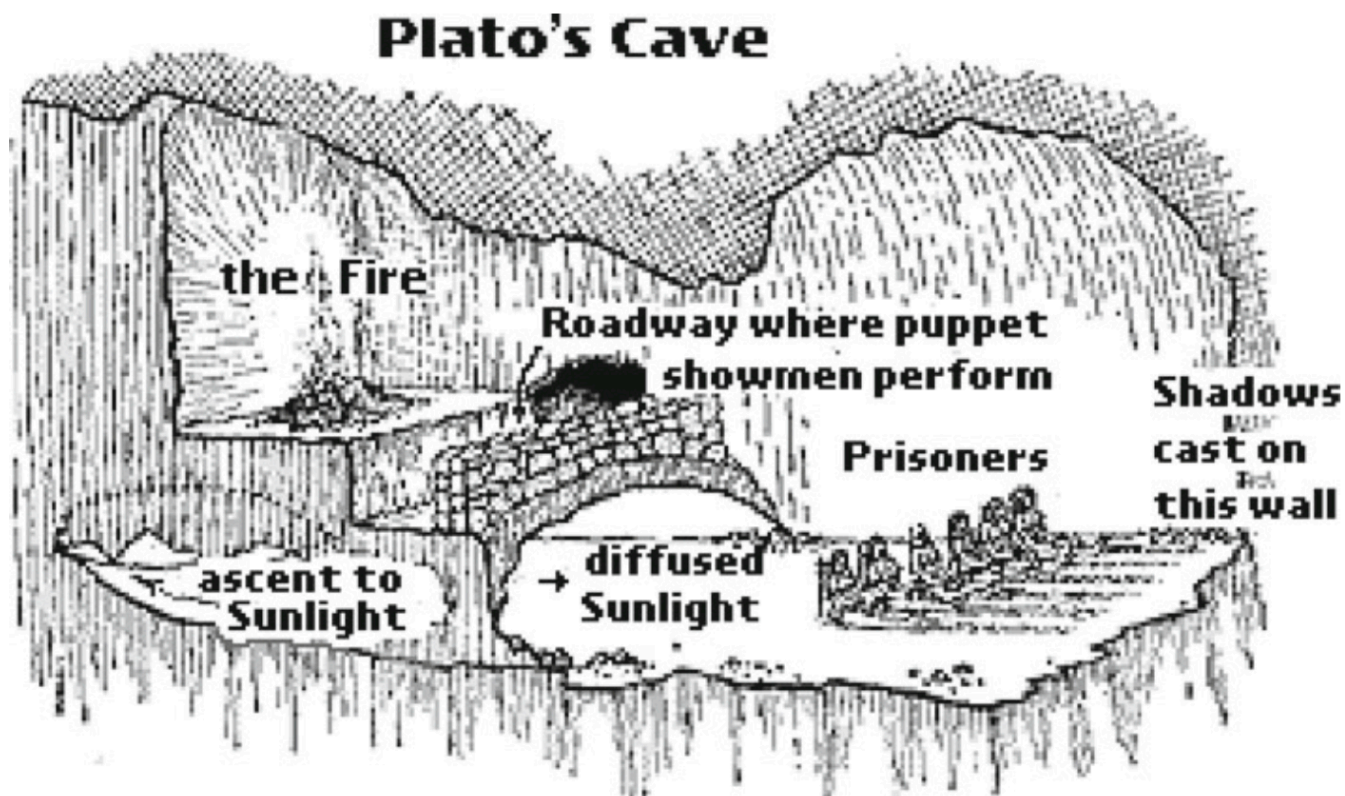


Figure 6.1.3 Plato's Cave (Francois, 2011)

To summarise the parable of the cave briefly, for those who have lived their entire lives as prisoners trapped inside a cave, the shadows on the wall are all the prisoners know. The shadows are their reality. When a prisoner escapes the cave and discovers true reality (i.e., a world outside the cave) and returns to inform the other shackled prisoners, the prisoners disregard this new reality as it contradicts with everything that they know. It is a world constructed of subjective appearances. The parable of the cave is an example of Platonic idealism, to me it symbolises a relative social reality that is constructed through the various interpretations of individuals. Through his theory of forms, Plato advocates that the reality we see is only a shadow of reality and only through the construction of abstract ideas beyond the material world can we only uncover true reality. Whilst Plato's philosophical arguments have impacted how I view research philosophy, alongside how it prompted me to think philosophically in

regard to my work, I have always found Platonic idealism a little too abstract. Within this applied context of exploring management practices of upland farmers, I feel something more grounded in empiricism is needed. The 'iron cage' theoretical underpinning and the embedment of various Weberian concepts into the methodology, such as *verstehen* and ideal type analysis, allow me to carry out a theoretically informed empirical study into the worlds of farmers.

The philosophical concept of *verstehen* underpins my interpretative/social constructionist approach, helping me understand individuals' lived experiences (i.e. farmer participants). *Verstehen* is a central philosophical concept underpinning Weber's interpretative sociology, it refers to the empathetic understanding of others. Whimster (2004:412) states *verstehen* 'means to understand the actions and meanings of another person... it enables our capacity to emphasise with the motives, thinking and expressions of other human beings'. Weber advocated in favour of methodological individualism, referring to a focus on individuals in society instead of focusing on ideal types. Weber regards humans as the 'atoms' of sociological inquiry, suggesting humans as being the only thing real in sociological inquiry and future sociological studies should focus on the collective experiences of individuals, with scholars acknowledging that concepts like 'the state', 'organisations' and 'communities' are ideal types and are not real and should not be reified. A methodological individualist approach underpinned with *verstehen* is used in this study, focusing on understanding approaches to farm entrepreneurship and strategic management from the perspective of individual farmers.

The inclusion of a Weberian theoretical lens influenced my decision to engage in empirical fieldwork. Weber (1978:4) regards sociology as 'a science concerning itself with the interpretative understanding of social action', arguing that there is a need to take into account empirical facts when attempting to understand the social world' (Swedberg and Agevall, 2016:116). Weber used ideal types as theoretical tools in his

methodologies to 'get an analytical grip on a concrete social phenomenon' (Swedberg and Agevall, 2016:156). The essence of an ideal type is to outline a simplified or pure version of reality, capturing the meaning behind social actions of individuals (Swedberg, 2018a). Ideal types are used to explore similarities and differences between ideal state theoretical constructs and empirical reality. They are a fundamental concept underpinning Weber's methodological approaches in helping him, and other sociologists, attempt to understand social actions in society. Later in the chapter I detail how exactly ideal types are used as an analytical tool within this study (section 6.6.1).

Finally, the inclusion of Weberian concepts coincides with the phenomenological and symbolic interactionist research design (outlined in the next section). Schultz (1972) in 'the phenomenology of the social world' repositions many of Weber's arguments and concepts, such as social action theory in a phenomenological context. Phenomenology and symbolic interactionism theories are grounded in methodological individualist approaches that concern attempting to interpretatively understand participants' 'lived experiences' from their point of view (Udehn, 2002). This is what I do in this study, adopt a phenomenological approach to understand the lived experiences of farmers. Phenomenology is introduced as one of the research strategies later in this chapter.

This sub-section has summarised the philosophical assumptions that underpin this research. They have been outlined and discussed early in the chapter as they underpin as these assumptions guide the choices that researchers need to make. The rural/agricultural context that this research is situated in is now discussed.

## 6.2 Research context

A key contribution of this methodological approach is utilising an ‘industry insider’ positionality. By this, I am referring to my own position within this study. I can be classified as an insider, someone who both lives and works on an active hill farm. This insider position, as will be discussed throughout this chapter, has shaped my methodological approach. My positionality has been a motivating factor in the selection of the research topic (section 1.1) and has influenced the methods used.

The primary motivation for undertaking this study is that I want to provide a reflective account of the lived experiences of English hill farmers at a pivotal time for UK agriculture: leaving the EU’s CAP. I recognise that British agriculture is in what some may call a state of transition. The removal of European subsidy support payments and a transition to the new ELMs suggests that many farmers will be rethinking their farm business strategies, in alignment with policy shifts (Gittins et al., 2020). While I believe there will be many opportunities for farmers post-Brexit, in particular those entrepreneurially orientated farmers, I think many will face increasing economic, social, and environmental challenges when adapting to legislative changes resulting from the creation of a DAP.

Coming from a farming background, I believe more empirical research should be carried out on how farmers manage their farm businesses, where researchers engage with farmer participants and attempt to understand it from their point of view. There is an increased call for scholars within social science research to bridge the gap between academic theory and practical application (Hamilton, 2018). I believe there is a disconnection between farming research and practice in the business and management literature. My aim is to utilise my industry insider positionality to collect empirical data from the worlds of farmers, drawing upon a range of academic theories and concepts, to produce research that is beneficial to academia and useful on a

practical level. Being an insider, allows me to approach this study from two angles. First from the angle of a farmworker, as someone who is immersed within farming activities and rural life. Second, from an academic perspective, I can draw on relevant theoretical tools to aid me in exploring the research question. Thus, an insider position allows me to bridge the gap between theory and practice.

### 6.2.1 Recalling the Research questions and aim

The research questions and overarching aim are now recalled before outlining the qualitative research design used to answer them. The overarching aim of this thesis is to explore the realities facing English upland beef and sheep farmers. It is an exploratory study that investigates how upland farmers are managing their farm businesses in response to the socio-political challenges within the beef and sheep sector. This thesis is guided by one overarching research question:

- What strategies are upland beef and sheep farmers in England using to manage their farm businesses in response to the socio-political challenges facing the sector?

Two further sub-research questions were developed from the literature review and theoretical underpinning chapter.

RQ1: To what extent are English upland farmers using entrepreneurial strategies to respond to the realities in the beef and sheep sector?

RQ1 looks at how entrepreneurial upland farmers are in their responses to the realities facing the beef and sheep sector, conceptualising upland farmers as entrepreneurs and as strategists. It explores the nature of strategies used by farmers to respond to the

realities in the sector. Farming contexts are neglected in management research terms, with a lack of literature focusing on exploring farm business strategies (Dias et al., 2019). To assess the entrepreneurial nature of upland farmers and their farm business strategies, relevant concepts are identified from the literature to look at farm entrepreneurship, such as a behavioural (Gartner, 1988) and trait-based approaches (Carland et al., 1988), spatial context (Muller and Korsgaard, 2018), amongst others through the adapted FSF.

RQ2: How might the challenges facing English upland beef and sheep farmers be constraining of entrepreneurial activity?

Whilst RQ2 looks specifically at the challenges facing upland farming businesses, looking at the extent in which certain challenges might be constraining to farm entrepreneurship. It is developed from the literature and theoretical underpinning chapters. The concept of 'constrained entrepreneurship', how endogenous and exogenous factors limit business activities (de Bruin and Dupuis, 2000; McElwee, 2006a) is used to help explore the challenges facing farm businesses. This RQ is underpinned with a theoretical underpinning identified in the thesis (chapter five), Max Weber's iron cage metaphor (Weber, 2001). Both Dias et al. (2019) and Fitz-Koch et al. (2018:32) in their literature reviews on agricultural entrepreneurship, found a lack of agricultural studies where authors have explicitly cited a theoretical base, suggesting future research should incorporate a sound theoretical underpinning to better 'contextualize entrepreneurial phenomena' in rural contexts. I make a theoretical and novel contribution to the literature by using Weber's iron cage to explore the concept of 'constrained entrepreneurship' in the agricultural sector, which helps me gain insight into upland farm enterprises' entrepreneurial and strategic management dynamics.

Exactly how these research questions are answered is presented in the following section, introducing the research design.

### 6.2.2 Research design.

In this sub-section, I outline the research design used to answer the study's research questions. As the research questions are exploratory, an exploratory research design is adopted to answer these questions. This is in the form of a multi-method qualitative study, employing a mixture of three research strategies: phenomenology, ethnography and a case study design. In alignment with this multiple methods approaches, semi-structured interviews, *ad-hoc* conversations, photographs and a research diary are all used to collect data. Findings are presented using Weberian influenced ideal types, fitting with the study's theoretical underpinning, alongside through the incorporation of case studies. This research design is underpinned by a social constructionist/interpretative approach and carried out somewhat abductively (Dubois and Gadde, 2002). An overview of my methodological approach is summarised in table 6.1.2 below. The research design is now explored in greater depth, introducing the research locations.

Interpretative paradigm				
Ontology	Epistemology	Axiology	Methodology	Methods
Relativism	Social constructionist	Value-laden	Multiple research strategies	Phenomenological interviews
Multiple realities exist	Verstehen/symbolic interactionist	Insider approach	Phenomenology, ethnography, case studies	Ad-hoc conversations

				and photographs
Subjectivism	Knowledge is grounded in experience, stories, narratives, beliefs, attitudes and perceptions	Reflexivity	Data saturation Thematic analysis Involvement and detachment	On-going research diary Abductive analysis

Table 6.2.2 Methodology summary

### 6.3 Research Locations and Participants Overview

As this research draws on an ethnographic approach to data collection, it is useful to introduce the research locations and participants. Reeves and Hodges (2008: 513) state: 'Ethnographers will often provide a detailed or "thick description" of the research setting and its participants, which will typically be based on many hours of direct observation and interviews with several key informants.' In this section, I do this, presenting a detailed description of the research locations and participants of this study. A more detailed discussion around data access, sampling and ethics is provided later in the chapter (Section 6.6).

The geographical scope for this study involves exploring English upland regions, those hilly and mountainous areas which are pre-dominantly farmed by cattle (beef) and sheep farmers. Various farmers and other agricultural stakeholders were interviewed throughout this research who worked in roles connected to English upland farming. Farmers from four different upland regions in Yorkshire, Lancashire, Cumbria and Exmoor were also interviewed.





Photo 1 Summer on a Yorkshire Farm (Author Generated)

Photo 1 shows my upland farm in Yorkshire. Upland areas can be beautiful depending upon the time of year, home to various ground-nesting birds in the spring and summer months, such as curlew, lapwing and skylark. Indeed, the picture, for me at least, presents a romanticised imagery of the rural (Mingay, 1974), showing wild heather, woodland, pastureland and wind turbines in the distance producing renewable energy (Morris and Bowen, 2020). However, winter can be a challenging time to live in these areas. As the temperature drops, water systems can freeze, farm tracks can become inaccessible, and there is a worry of pneumonia and other problems

in livestock. Photo 2 below shows the same hillside in a frozen state, illustrative of the severe weather challenges upland farmers face (see section 7.5.4).



Photo 2 Farming in Winter (Author Generated)



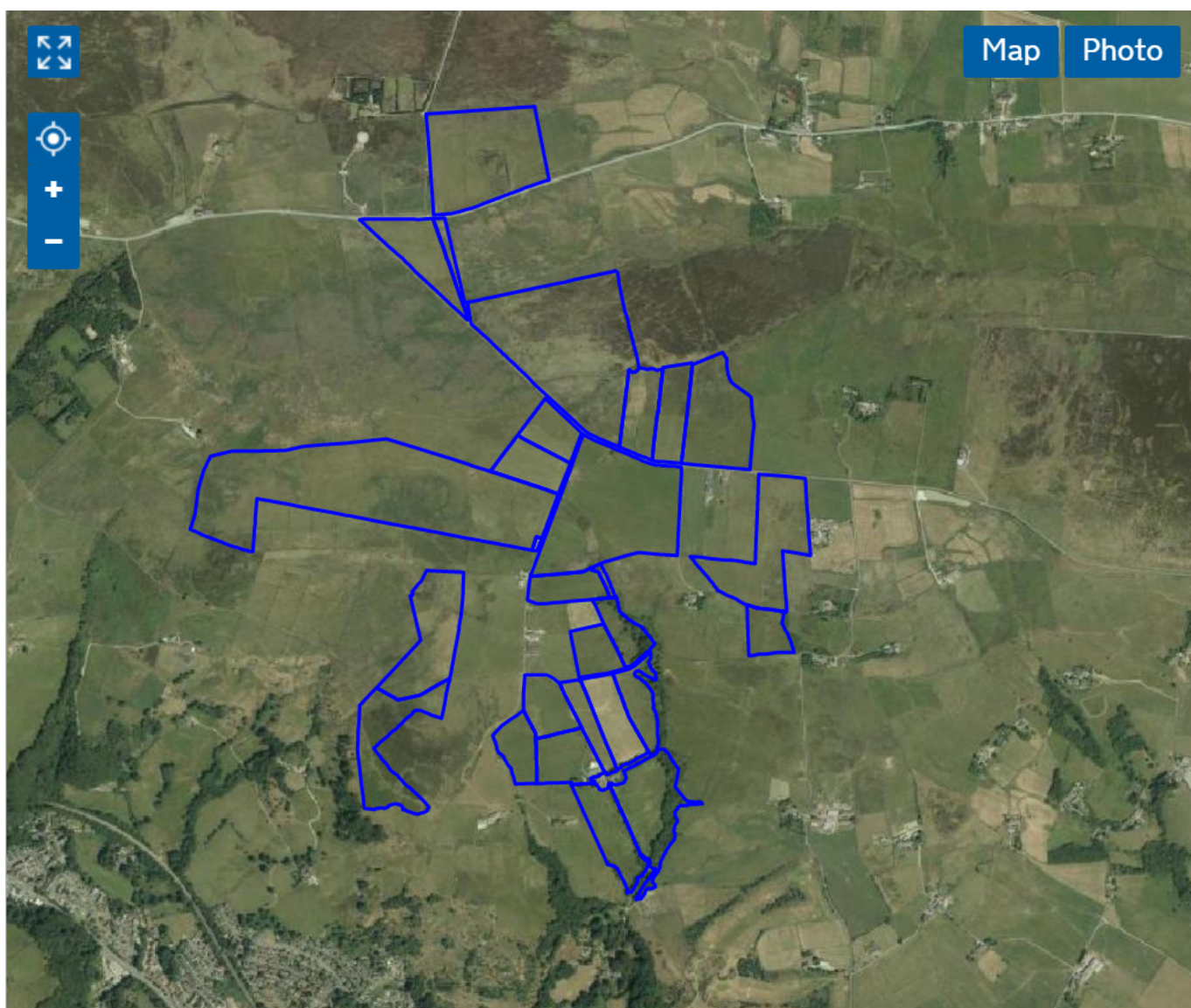


Figure 6.3 Farm mapping (author generated) (DEFRA ordinance survey map)

Figure 6.3 shows a satellite view of my upland farm, which is approximately 1,400 feet above sea level. The areas highlighted in blue are the land which we own. It is just over 100 hectares in size, which is an average-sized upland farm compared to some of the other farms within this study. A small proportion of our farm consists of ‘marginal land’, which is of little agricultural use and provides little value in terms of being suitable to grow crops or rear livestock on. Moreover, it is located on the rural/urban

fringe, only a couple of minutes drives from a local town with supermarkets and a train station with connections to major UK cities.



Figure 6.3.1 (Google Maps) Moorlands Aerial View

In contrast, figure 6.3.1 shows a satellite view of a different farm in West Yorkshire, a few miles north of us. It varies greatly in terms of location and topographical make-up. The darker areas of land are mainly marginal areas, consisting mainly of moorland. While these areas often have little agricultural value in terms of grazing livestock or growing crops, they do have environmental benefits. Farmers can receive payments for this land through agri-environmental schemes. A comparison of the two figures shows geographical and topographical features can vary between rural areas, creating different contexts for [entrepreneurial] farmers to operate within. The locations in which farmers operate within are discussed further later in the thesis (Section 6.3.2).

In this study, farmers were interviewed from four different English upland regions. Each of these four regions provides diversity to the sample. Like me, some live on the fringe of urban living, whereas other farmers operated in more geographically isolated parts of the country. The participants operate in somewhat different rural contexts and encounter a number of different constraints, all relative to their local environment and contexts. These four regions are now presented briefly, alongside an overview of the farmer participants interviewed.

### 6.3.1 Yorkshire

The Yorkshire sample was selected mainly for its convenience (Brewis, 2014). As I am utilising an industry insider approach, I first made use of my farmer contacts. The Yorkshire sample was split between farmers located in West Yorkshire, with some farmers living on the rural-urban fringe, alongside included other farmers situated in more rural regions, such as North Yorkshire moors national park and the Yorkshire Dales. Figure 6.2.1 below illustrates this research location.

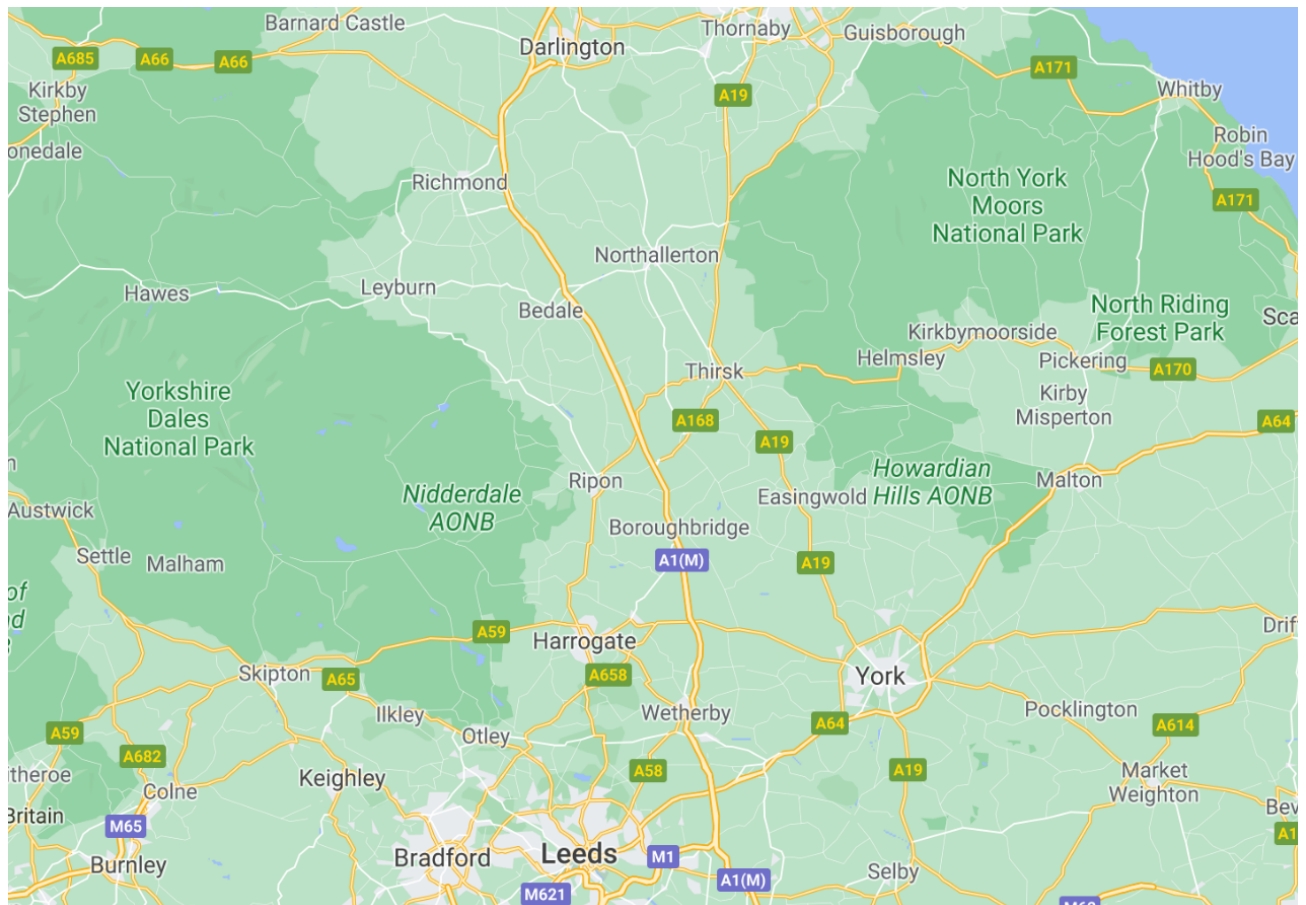


Figure 6.3.1 Yorkshire research site (Google maps, 2021)



### 6.3.2 Lancashire

The farmers from Lancashire owned and rented farms near the Forest of Bowland, an Area of Outstanding National Beauty (AONB). Being an AONB, the Forest of Bowland consists of protected lands that have high ecological value, it has a diverse landscape filled with various flora and fauna with large amounts of heather moorland and blanket peat bogs. Some farmers from Lancashire were identified from my network, while others contacted me following a research call for participants posted in a weekly farming online newsletter.



Figure 6.3.2 Lancashire research site (Google maps, 2021)

### 6.3.3 Cumbria

Cumbria is home to the Lake District national park; it attracts almost 16 million visitors each year. Many farmers within this region have diversified their farm businesses to accommodate tourism demands. Interviewing farmers from this region added further diversity to my sample, where farm diversification strategies were a central topic. Participants were identified in this region after expanding my network beyond that of my personal family and friend's. One farmer from Cumbria was

identified after staying at her family's glamping site during summer 2020, whilst two more farmers were introduced through social media.

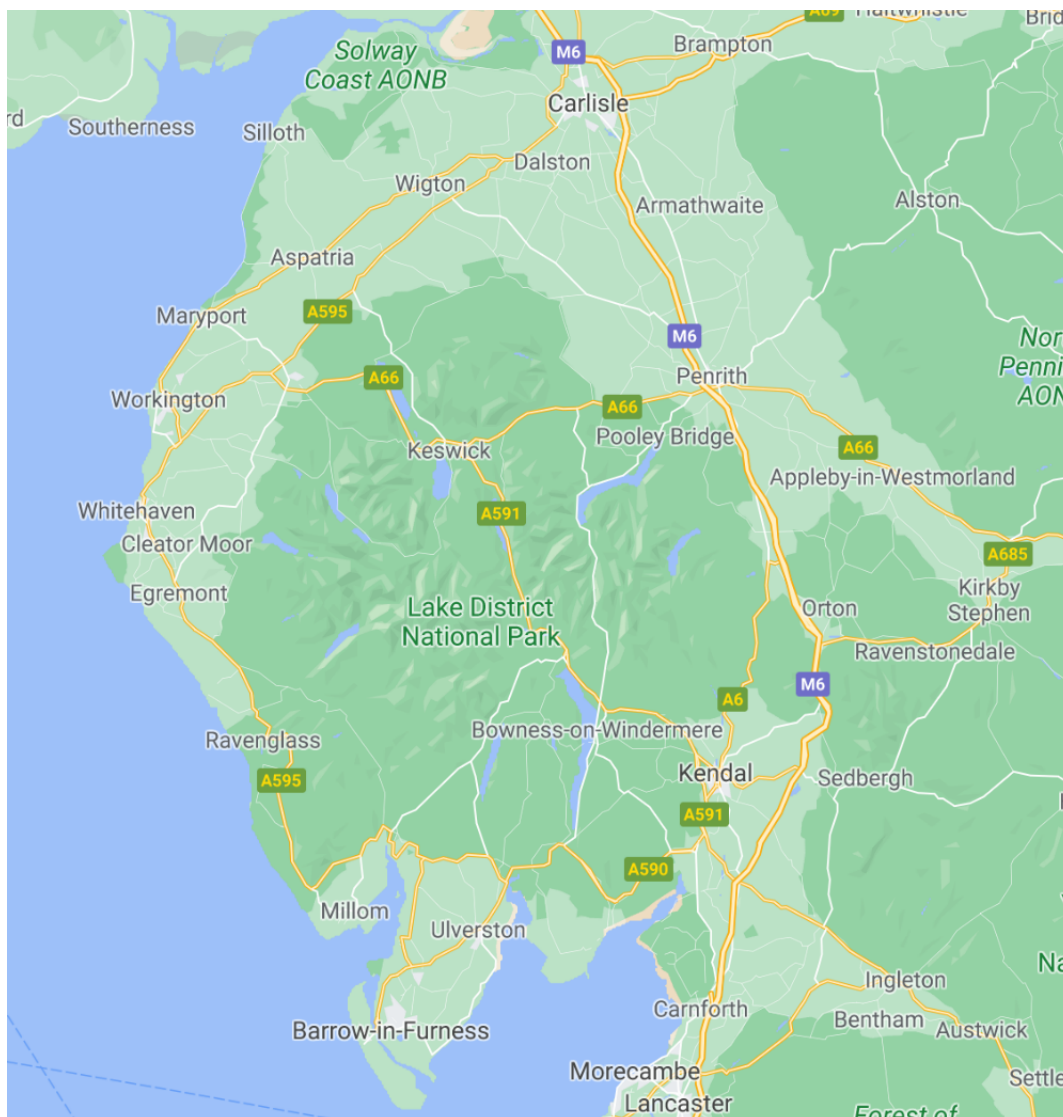


Figure 6.3.3 Lake District National Park (Google maps, 2021)

#### 6.3.4 Exmoor

After attending a virtual farming event run by an agricultural trade body, I contacted a farmer who introduced me to some upland farmers within the region of Exmoor national park. This region was interesting as the farmers here seemed to embrace the environmental side of farming more so than others in the sample, using terms such as 'regenerative agriculture', 'sustainable farming' and 'rotational grazing'. This group of



farmers added further diversity to my sample, in terms of farmers actively pursuing innovative environmental-based strategies. The Exmoor sample is also the only research site in this study located in South England. Interviewing farmers across four research locations allowed me to gain a holistic account of the different challenges facing English upland farmers.

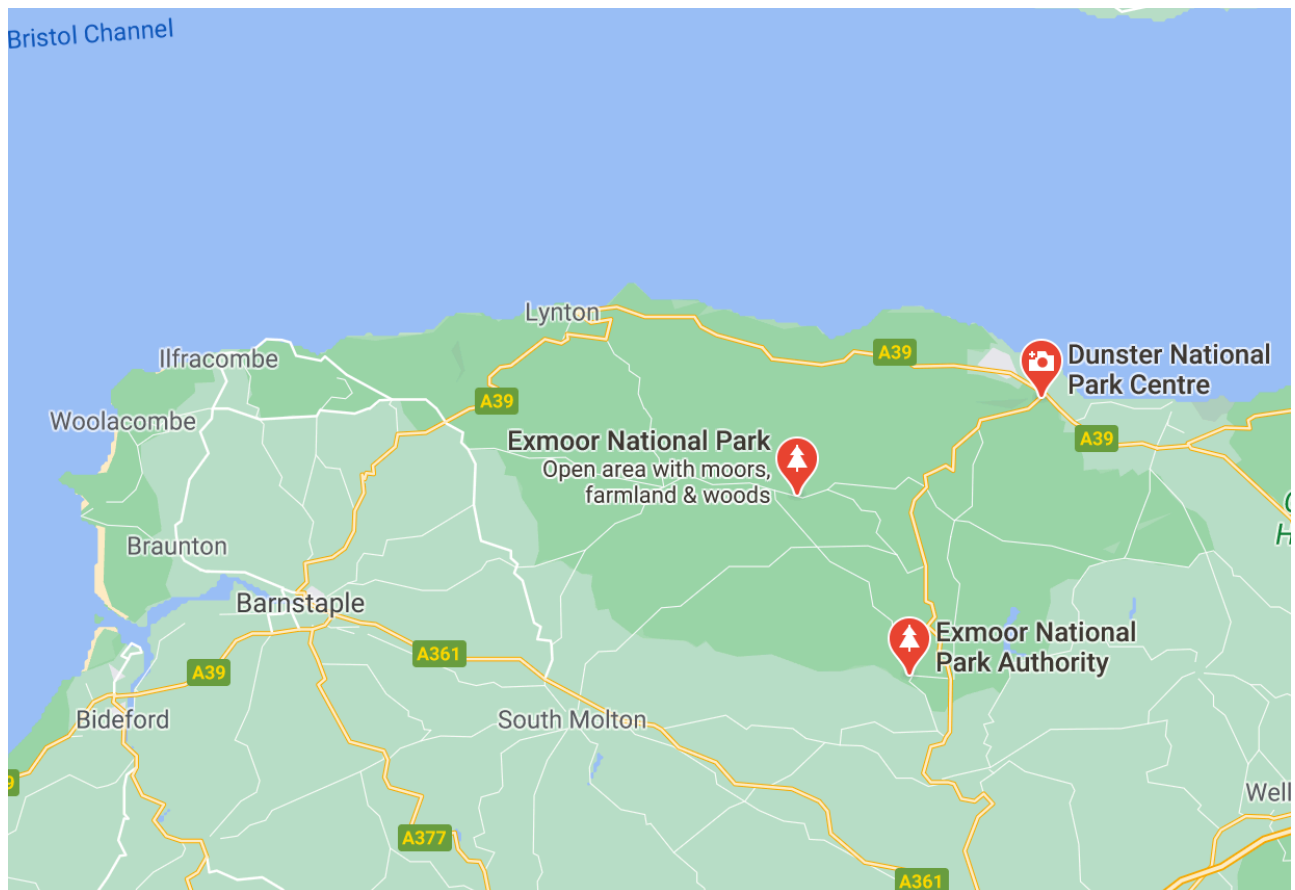


Figure 6.3.4 Exmoor National Park (Google Maps, 2021)

### 6.3.5 Farmers and agricultural stakeholders

I gained a deep understanding of the concerns facing farmers by using the adapted Farmer Segmentation Framework (FSF). Insight into the personal characteristics of farmers, the nature of their farm businesses, alongside exploring the context in which farmers operated within, allowed me to develop a rich profile of each interviewee. An overview of each research participant in relation to the four research sites and some features of the FSF can be seen in the tables below.

Name	Gender	Age	Education	Location	Status	Experience (years)	Farm Size (hectare)
Amy	Female	20-29	Undergraduate	Yorkshire	Owner	5-10	50-99
Chris	Male	30-39	College/A-Level	Yorkshire	Owner	5-10	100-199
Claire	Female	60-69	Technical Education	Exmoor	Owner	20+	50-99
Dr. Jacob	Male	40-49	Doctorate	Yorkshire	Tenant	10-20	0-9
Duncan	Male	70-79	No education	Yorkshire	Owner	20+	50-99
Gordon	Male	70-79	College/A-level	Lancashire	Tenant	20+	1000+
Isaac	Male	30-39	Undergraduate	Yorkshire	Owner	10-20	25-49
Josh	Male	30-39	No education	Lancashire	Tenant	20+	100-199
Lucy	Female	60-69	Basic Education	Cumbria	Owner	20+	100-199
Margaret	Female	70-79	Undergraduate	Cumbria	Owner	20+	1000+
Mike	Male	60-69	No education	Yorkshire	Owner	20+	100-199
Nick	Male	30-39	College/A-level	Exmoor	Tenant	10-20	400-699
Oliver	Male	50-59	College Education	Lancashire	Tenant	20+	10-24
Richard	Male	60-69	College/A-level	Yorkshire	Tenant	20+	200-399
Robert	Male	50-59	Basic Education	Yorkshire	Owner	20+	100-199
Roger	Male	40-49	Basic Education	Cumbria	Owner	20+	400-699
Sarah	Female	30-39	Undergraduate	Exmoor	Tenant	2	50-99

Simon	Male	30-39	Undergraduate	Exmoor	Owner /tenant	10-20	100-199
Stacey	Female	30-39	Undergraduate	Exmoor	Owner /tenant	2	100-199
Tom	Male	50-59	No education	Lancashire	Tenant	20+	10-24

Table 6.3.5 English upland farmer interviews (Segmentation Framework)

It can be seen from table 6.3.5 above, that the sample farmers are quite diverse. I managed to interview farmers of different ages, genders, locations, ownership statuses and educational backgrounds. This analysis allowed me to explore in-depth the relative constraints facing individual farmers across various locations. Interestingly, over one-quarter of the sample are female farmers. This provided me with the opportunity to explore the role of women in farming businesses, an area in the literature that was found to need further attention (Damisa and Yohanna, 2007; Nain and Kumar, 2010; Chayal et al., 2013). Moreover, an insider approach allowed me to contact not only those more entrepreneurially orientated and/or technologically inclined farmers through online methods, but also contact those more traditionally orientated farmers who ordinarily would not take part in industry or academic research.

Pseudonym	Type of organisation/role	Length of interview	Topics discussed
Angela	Sheep focused trade body	1 hour	Challenges facing sheep farmers
Ash	Agricultural levy board	90 mins	Challenges in red meat supply chains

Eddy	Rural research consultant	60 mins	Challenges in the red meat sector
Hank	Agricultural trade body	30 mins	Beef and sheep supply chains. Impact of Brexit and Covid-19 from farmer members
Rebecca	Agricultural trade body	30 mins	Challenges facing upland farmer members
Linda	Agricultural charity	60 mins	Mental health in agriculture
Marcus	Wildlife and environmental consultant	60 mins	Farming and the environment
Mel	Agricultural trade body	60 mins	ELMS and upland farming
Rachel	Livestock consultant	30 mins	Economic, social and environmental factors in red meat production
Simon	Agricultural trade body	60 mins	Top performing beef and sheep farms

Table 6.3.5 Industry stakeholders

Moreover, by combining both farmer and agricultural stakeholder interviews, I gained a rich account of the challenges facing farmers, interviewing stakeholders from

some of the most recognised UK agricultural trade bodies and organisations (table three above). These trade bodies deal with upland farmers directly in terms of running UK farmer membership schemes and conduct research themselves. They can be considered policy influencers and hold a wealth of knowledge into the practices and realities of upland farmers.

Low and MacMillan (1988) state that five levels of analysis (individual, group, organization, industry and society) can be used to develop a richer understanding of entrepreneurial phenomena. The inclusion of farmer and agricultural stakeholder interviews, underpinned with the FSF, allows these multiple analysis units to be explored. Lindgren and Packendorff (2009:38) suggest 'if different stories from different involved actors are brought together in the analysis, our understanding of the [entrepreneurial] process could be much broader'. Thus, analysing multiple levels of analysis in this study enables a deeper understanding of the phenomena of farm entrepreneurship and approaches to strategic management.

The prior sections have outlined the research context, introduced the research locations and participants. In the following section, my worldview is discussed in relation to the methodological choices I have made throughout the research process.

#### 6.4 Research Strategies and Data Collection

In this section, the research strategies are presented. First, I justify why a qualitative methodology is most appropriate in answering the study's research questions, alongside discuss how it aligns with my own philosophical assumptions. I next discuss how a mixture of three research strategies, phenomenology, ethnography and case studies allows me to answer the study's research questions. I then discuss the qualitative data collection methods used. An overview of these methods concerning the research strategies can be seen in table 6.4 below.

Data collection instrument	Purpose	Number of transcripts, photos, documents, entries etc.	Timespan
Phenomenological interviews	To explore in-depth the challenges facing upland farmers.	30 interviews. (20) farmer interviews. (10) agricultural stakeholder interviews.	June 2020- October 2020.
Conversations	To collect additional data whilst out and about in the field.	30 reflectional notes from conversations with various farmers and agricultural stakeholders when out in the field.	June 2019- December 2020.
Photos	To visually capture the realities facing farmers.	800+ photos taken to capture the 'realities' of farmers.	January 2019- June 2021.
Research diary	To reflect on my own research practice, understanding the justification behind changes to my work.	A minimum of 1 entry per week since starting the PhD, reflecting on the research process.	January 2019- October 2021.

Table 6.4 Data Collection Instruments

### 6.4.1 Qualitative Methodology

A qualitative research methodology, underpinned by *verstehen*, allows me to explore the research questions and understand farmer participants' realities and lived experiences. Researchers using qualitative methods use non-statistical means to attempt to understand the experiences associated with human behaviour (Atkinson et al., 2000). Qualitative research methods are well suited to interpretative research designs, allowing multiple realities of participants to be explored through understanding subjective meaning (O'Gorman and Macintosh, 2017). A qualitative approach allows me to uncover attitudes, beliefs, and values regarding various research phenomena (i.e., challenges facing farmers, views of farm entrepreneurship, approaches to strategic management). It allows me to explore the socially constructed worlds of farmer participants.

In terms of the social constructionist epistemological approach, qualitative research methods can promote an understanding of how farmers view farm entrepreneurship phenomena, such as how farmers construct identities (Fitz-Koch et al., 2017). I combine qualitative data collection methods to support my value-laden axiological approach, using *ad-hoc* conversations, interviews, photographs and research diary whilst engaging in qualitative fieldwork. These research strategies, alongside how they translate into fieldwork, are now discussed.

### 6.4.2 Phenomenology

This study uses a phenomenological framework to understand (*verstehen*) the everyday realities facing English upland farmers. This type of interpretative, phenomenological and social constructionist work is scarce within the farm entrepreneurship literature (McElwee, 2008a). The thesis aim is to explore the

challenges facing farmers and understand the types of business strategies farmers are using to respond to these challenges. Employing a phenomenological approach helps to meet this aim.

Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) is the phenomenological approach underpinning this study. Eatough and Smith (2017: 218) state the purpose of IPA is 'to explore in detail the participants' view of the topic under investigation'. Simply, to understand from the interviewee's perspective (i.e., the farmer) how they perceive certain phenomena, such as the challenges facing them. Researchers try to get as close as possible to the realities of the participants. The 'industry insider approach allows me to do this.

Alongside including the work of Weber, which has been adopted by various phenomenological scholars (Schultz, 1972), I draw inspiration in my methodological design from the work of a seminal phenomenological scholar, Heidegger. This branch of phenomenology differs from traditional Husserlian phenomenology, with researchers not attempting to bracket existing pre-conceptions they have around a research phenomenon. Heidegger argues that researchers are a part of the research process and it is counter-intuitive to try and remove one's own values from the research process (Tufford and Newman, 2012b). I follow Heidegger's view that 'fully comprehending the lived experience was, in essence, an interpretative process and that bracketing out preconceptions was neither possible nor desirable' (Tufford and Newman, 2012:3). Rather, researchers should use their own pre-conceptions to influence the research process whilst remaining reflexive in doing so, but rather recognising when to become more involved and detached (Sinclair, 2015).

Phenomenological interviews apply the underpinning components of phenomenology (a focus of understanding lived experiences) to an interview setting (Bevan, 2014). Participants being interviewed should have experienced the



phenomenon under examination. For example, two phenomena under investigation in this study are farm entrepreneurship and approach to strategic management. I need to identify participants with these experiences, such as farm holders and other key stakeholders connected to the upland farm sector.

Researchers have a choice in regard to the format of interviews, such as being either structured, semi-structured or unstructured (Saunders et al., 2019). Semi-structured interviews allow researchers to pre-determine certain questions but also probe participants responses and go off tangent from the schedule (Bryman, 2008). Whilst unstructured approaches are largely informal, and researchers do not pre-determine any questions to ask participants (Collins, 1998). Semi-structured phenomenological interviews are used in this study, due to the limited amount of time I had with each farmer participant. Whilst *ad-hoc* conversations which are also used might be considered a form of unstructured interviewing. Five broad questions derived from the farmer segmentation framework were asked to each farmer:

- Tell me about yourself? (Personal characteristics of farmers)
- Tell me about your farm? (Farm business characteristics)
- How's business going? (Activities and process undertaken by the farm business)
- What farm business strategies do you have? (Approaches to strategic management)
- What is an entrepreneurial farmer to you? (Approaches to farm entrepreneurship)

The loose interview structure led to incredibly detailed responses from participants. Two pilot interviews were carried out before undertaking the semi-structured

interviews. This enabled me to familiarise myself with qualitative interviewing and led to the production of a conference paper from the results (see Gittins, 2019), furthering my professional development as a researcher.

### 6.4.3 Ethnography

Some elements of this work can be categorised as largely ethnographic in nature. Ladner (2014: 15) regards ethnography as a 'study of culture', suggesting that ethnographers become deeply embedded in cultures (e.g. farming cultures, religious groups etc.), documenting aspects of social life and making interpretations about meanings. Ethnographers use methods from the disciplines of anthropology to observe cultures over a period of time and 'attempt to explain what life means to these people' (Ladner, 2014). Ethnography also takes an 'emic' stance, the viewpoint of participants, similar to phenomenology. The ethnographic research strategy compliments this work by allowing me to empirically explore the context farmers operate within.

There are many similarities between ethnography and phenomenology. Both are research strategies used to explore subjective phenomena, where researchers typically use qualitative methods such as interviews and observations to understand participants' voices within certain social groups (Katz and Csordas, 2003). However, phenomenologists attempt to explore individual experiences of a phenomenon (i.e., someone who has lived experience), whereas ethnographers are more focused on the collective experiences of a community (Katz and Csordas, 2003).

Whilst there are limitations in each research strategy, combining ethnography with phenomenology in this multi-methods design offers a form of data triangulation (Maggs-Rapport, 2000). *Ad-hoc* conversations in the field, photographs and a research diary are commonly used in ethnographic studies to collect data from participants and capture the researcher's subjectivity throughout the research process (Atkinson et al.,

2000; Hammersley and Atkinson, 2019). Ethnographic methodologies have also been employed by Neo-Weberian scholars including Norbert Elias (2000), reflecting how an ethnographic approach aligns with this study's classical sociological theoretical underpinning (Baur et al., 2019). Moreover, a combination of phenomenology and ethnography allows me to explore farmers' individual and cultural experiences.

Alongside phenomenological in-depth interviews, an ethnographic approach is also taken in regard to collecting field notes. *Ad hoc* conversations are used, in a more longitudinal manner, to collect additional data when out and about in the field. I use the term *ad hoc* here referring to when conversations with relevant participants (farmers, academics, agricultural stakeholders) arrived from serendipitous events. The length of the fieldwork varied depending upon the data collection method used. For example, semi-structured interviews were carried out during the summer months of 2020 (May-October). Whilst conversations, photographs and visual methods were carried out from the start of the PhD in more of a longitudinal manner. It is not always practical to carry out a semi-structured interview. As I work on a farm and engage with local farmers at auction markets, abattoirs, rural fairs and events, I often have conversations with many people. This material complemented the 'formal' data collection within this study. Doing so allowed me to understand, from the perspective of the farmer, some of the 'present realities' facing upland farmers (Maye et al., 2018).



Photo 3 Bovine tuberculosis (TB) Testing on Mike's farm (Author Generated)

An example is provided to illustrate how powerful conversations can be as a data collection tool. Whilst working out in the field and helping Mike on his farm (photo 3), I gained some insight into bovine tuberculosis (TB) testing on a hill farm. A local outbreak of TB requires all farms within a three-mile radius of Mike's farm to test their cattle for TB. Here I could have conversations with the farm holder, farm labourer and the veterinarian carrying out the test, I could observe in practice how this stressful event was being carried out on farm. There was no formality of an interview process. Setting up the farm equipment, talking with vets and farmers, hearing the results and working out in the cold and the rain allowed me to physically experience some of the everyday realities facing English upland and hill farmers. Without using conversations (alongside photographs) and my own professional background, much

of this data would have been missed. As I am immersed in the farming world constantly due to my insider position, these spontaneous conversations often emerge. Conversations help capture these everyday realities without having a formal interview environment.

Several papers influenced me to include visual methods to aid my ethnographic encounters, such as O'Rourke's (2019) work on land abandonment, alongside Schwartz (1989) who incorporates photographs to illustrate the realities facing rural communities. Schwartz (1989: 120) states photographs can be 'viewed as records, photographs thought to reproduce the reality in front of the camera's lens, yielding an unmediated and unbiased visual report'. Other, more recent work, has incorporated some photographic visual methods, but it is not as widely used as other qualitative research techniques in management research, such as interviews (Banks, 2018). The use of visual methods in farm entrepreneurship work is still extremely limited. As this study aims to explore the realities facing farmers, photographs allow these realities to be illustrated, showing readers exactly what I see when I am collecting data. The use of *ad-hoc* conversations and photographs allow me to collect some data in an inductive way.

Another data collection and reflexive tool used in this study is a research diary. Diaries of my own professional development, assumptions and changes to the study have been noted throughout. Since starting my PhD I have added weekly entries into the diary. This reflexive approach allows me to analyse my own subjectivity in the research process. Below is an entry into my diary:

*'My methods have slightly changed due to coronavirus, after discussing with my supervisor we have agreed that phone interviews are now the best course of action.'*

*He also reminded me to keep updating this research diary and log any unforeseen changes to my research to remind myself why I make any changes to the research.'*

(Research Diary, May 1<sup>st</sup> 2020).

### Personal Reflection

Initially, I set out to conduct all farm interviews in person, hoping for farmers to give me a short farm walk as they talk about the problems facing them. Due to COVID-19 restrictions, this was no longer feasible. I planned to attend social farming events, such as the Yorkshire Agricultural Show to meet potential participants and have a few conversations. These social events were all cancelled. Moreover, I could no longer talk to farmers at auction markets due to the social distancing measures in place. I had to reflect on these changes ethically, consulting guidance from my supervisor, and seeing how other qualitative researchers are adapting to the changing circumstances amidst the pandemic.

I felt it would be unethical of me to continue conducting on-farm interviews during these times, as farmers themselves are key workers. I then had to think about alternative qualitative methods that would still allow for exploring the research aim. In-person interviews could be turned to phone interviews, *ad-hoc* conversations could be utilised further when I am out working in the farming community, photographs can be used to showcase these realities, alongside a research diary could be used to keep track of any changes made during the research project. Jowett's (2020) article 'carrying out qualitative research under lockdown' helped me reflect on alternative qualitative research methods.

Moreover, the diary played an essential role in helping me log my professional development as a researcher. Early in the project, I had a general idea of the area of research, strategy and entrepreneurship in farming contexts. However, I was unsure

of many things, the farm sector I wanted to explore, the geographical scope, who I should speak to and how I would gain access to participants. However, conversations with my supervisory team and networking at rural entrepreneurship events allowed me to gain feedback on my proposal early on and begin to shape it into a manageable research project. Early feedback from industry stakeholders also allowed me to focus my research on a specific farming sector (i.e, beef and lamb) within one specific geographical location, English upland regions. An extract below shows some feedback I received from a senior manager from a well-known agricultural trade body:

Email from 09/09/2019

“Without having the full details some initial thoughts:

You are biting off a lot of trying to cover all 4 nations. We expect differences in agricultural policy across the nations – and you could end up having to spend a lot of time on this. How will you distribute your 20 farmer interviews to get coverage by sector and nation? You could make your life easier by focusing on England or one of the other nations.”

Reflection Recorded in Diary

A research diary has enabled me to engage in reflexivity throughout this research. Whilst there are some limitations in using a research diary as a data collection method, such as it is moving the focus away from farmer participants and making it about me, I feel it is necessary to have a research diary seen as though one of the contributions in this thesis is a methodological one. If I am to make a methodological contribution, I must be clear on my justification behind the methods chosen to answer the research question, and a reflexive approach through using a diary is essential in doing this.

#### 6.4.4 Case Studies

The case study research strategy is also used. Yin (2014) defines a case study as an empirical investigation that considers various contemporary phenomena within a

real-life context. Case studies can be used in both quantitative and qualitative methodologies. They can comprise of individual cases (Gittins et al., 2020), multiple cases (Smith et al., 2020), community studies (O'Rourke, 2019), social group studies (Ellis, 1986) or case studies of events, such as the foot and mouth outbreak (Perry et al., 2002). Case studies are used to 'examine complex phenomena in the natural setting' (Heale and Twycross, 2018:7).

As a multi-methods qualitative approach is used, multiple research strategies are employed. A social group case study approach is used to scope participants within a geographical context, English hill and upland farmers. Ethnographic techniques are used to collect data along the research process, taking advantage of my own axiological positioning as an 'industry insider'. Whilst IPA underpins this study, understanding (*verstehen*) from the lived experiences of farmer cases the realities facing them through in-depth semi-structured interviews. There are limitations in combining different research strategies, such as this study not being of a 'pure' ethnographic or phenomenological design. However, mixing these research strategies is justified due to the multi-methods study design and lack of interpretative research designs in rural entrepreneurship studies (McElwee, 2008).

The inclusion of case studies helps capture the diverse contexts in which farmers operate within, showing the features of the geographical regions where farm businesses are located. They can also be compared and contrasted with other case studies, helping to show the variation and highlight the heterogeneity of each case. Now that the research strategies and data collection methods have been presented, approaches to data analysis are discussed.

## 6.5 Data Analysis

Several analytical techniques could be used to analyse the qualitative data collected, such as content analysis, thematic analysis, discourse analysis, conversation analysis



*inter alia*. In the following sections, a rationale is provided for the inclusion of thematic analysis.

Braun and Clarke (2012:37) are probably the most well-known scholars when it comes to thematic analysis:

‘Thematic analysis [TA] is a method for systematically identifying, organizing, and offering insight into patterns of meaning (themes) across a data set... TA allows the researcher to see and make sense of collective or shared meanings and experiences’

TA is the analytical technique that is used within this research to analyse meanings and experiences found within the qualitative data sets. Braun and Clarke (2012) note that thematic analysis aligns well with multiple methods studies, fitting with the design of this research. Thematic analysis is quite fluid in nature, useful for inductive, deductive and abductive studies. The phenomenological underpinning of this research, focused on the lived experience of farmers, suggests this analytical approach aligns well with the aim which is focused on understanding (*verstehen*) the realities facing farmers. TA is centred around analysing qualitative data and producing codes and themes (based on experiences) which attempt to answer a research question. Thematic analysis is about finding meaningful patterns, such as generating codes based on meaning as opposed to frequency. It can be used to identify both semantic (i.e., surface) and latent (i.e., deeper) meanings, suggesting it is an appropriate analytical tool for this research.

Braun and Clarke’s (2012) six stage approach to thematic analysis is used throughout the analytical process, these steps include:

1. Data familiarisation

2. Initial code generation
3. Theme generation
4. Review themes
5. Definition of themes
6. Produce the report

This coding process is now discussed in the context of this work. NVivo was used to organise my data. Using a Qualitative Data Analysis Software (QDAS) was convenient, allowing me to organise my data efficiently and saved time compared to manual coding methods. As I have lots of data ranging from interview transcripts, conversational notes, field notes, an ongoing research diary and photographs, using NVivo allowed me to store and engage with the data in one place

Through the classification feature in NVivo I was able to profile each of the farmer participants in relation to the adapted upland farmer segmentation framework (Table 6.3.5). Here I coded each farmer participant in relation to the features of the FSF (i.e., personal characteristics, farm business characteristics and the business activities and processes connected to the farm). This proved to be a powerful analytical tool in which I could quickly compare and contrast each farmer case with one another.

In order to familiarise myself with the data (stage one Braun and Clarke, 2012) I manually transcribed the recordings verbatim, I usually did this within 24 hours of conducting the interview. Manual transcription allowed me to reflect on what the participant said and become somewhat detached from the research process by helping me analyse my own interviewing style. During a couple of the interviews early on, I realised at certain points I wasn't giving participants a long enough pause to allow

them to think. Familiarising myself with the recording allowed me to improve my own interviews skills for the next interview.

In terms of generating the initial codes (stage two), two phases were conducted with each interview transcript. First, I read the transcripts and listened alongside the recordings, using the 'annotation' function within NVivo to try and interpret topics and themes discussed by each participant. Figure 6.5.1 below shows an example of how annotations were used to generate initial themes (stage three).

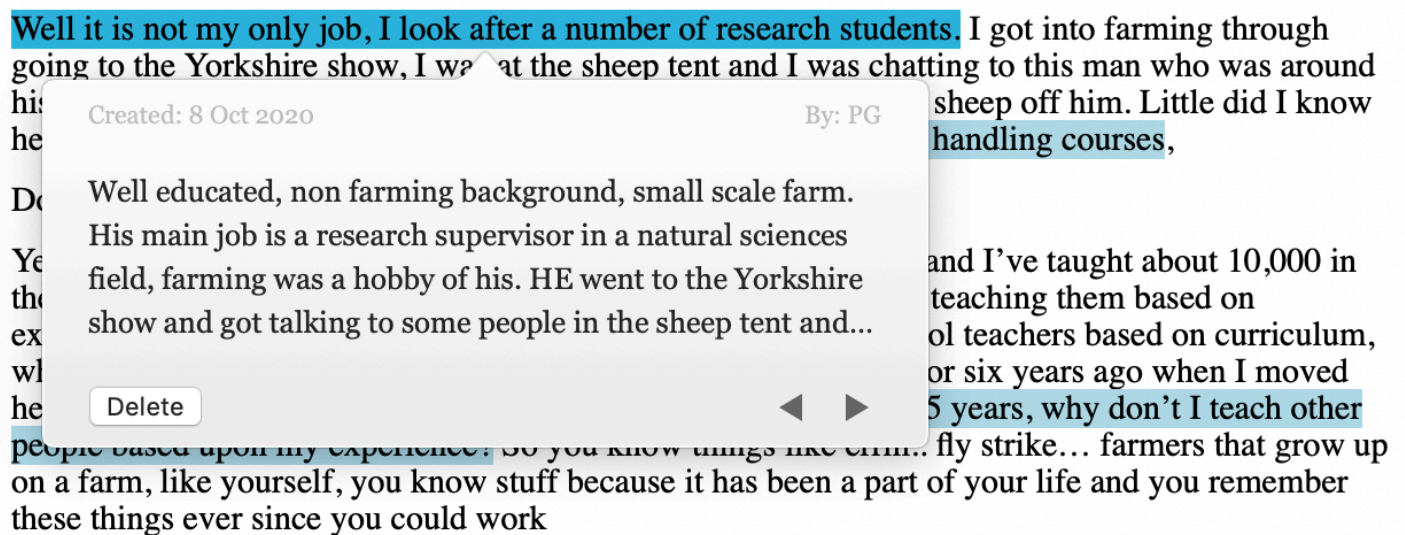


Figure 6.5.1 Using annotations in NVivo (Author Generated)

After making initial annotations across each of the transcripts, conversational notes and diary entries, I then re-read each transcript with the annotations and generated some initial codes. This was quite a messy process as hundreds of codes were generated (Figure 6.5.2 below).

Moving into stage four in Braun and Clarke's analysis, I then began a process of reviewing the codes or what I call 'coding the codes.' From the hundreds of codes generated, I then started looking to see where I could merge codes into broader

themes. This not only allowed me to erase duplicated or irrelevant codes, but it also allowed me to organise my data in such a way that was more manageable.

Codes								Search Project	
Name	Files	Refere	Created on	Created	Modified on	Modifie			
access to funding	1	1	01/12/2020	PG	01/12/2020	PG			
access to suicide	1	1	30/11/2020	PG	30/11/2020	PG			
Agri environment payments offer certainty	2	2	27/11/2020	PG	01/12/2020	PG			
agri schemes and tennant farmers	1	1	30/11/2020	PG	30/11/2020	PG			
agro forrestory	1	1	24/11/2020	PG	24/11/2020	PG			
allocation of money	1	1	30/11/2020	PG	30/11/2020	PG			
almost a class system	1	1	25/11/2020	PG	25/11/2020	PG			
analytical skills	1	1	25/11/2020	PG	25/11/2020	PG			
anti farming	1	1	01/12/2020	PG	01/12/2020	PG			
beef and sheep have more emmissions than other meat i.e pig	1	1	25/11/2020	PG	25/11/2020	PG			
benefits of eating meat	2	2	25/11/2020	PG	01/12/2020	PG			
benefits of UK farming	1	1	30/11/2020	PG	30/11/2020	PG			
boundaries for carbon capture	1	1	30/11/2020	PG	30/11/2020	PG			
broadband not so much as a problem any more	1	1	01/12/2020	PG	01/12/2020	PG			
business plan	1	2	24/11/2020	PG	24/11/2020	PG			
carbon capture tools are poor	1	1	30/11/2020	PG	30/11/2020	PG			
carbon seq	1	1	25/11/2020	PG	25/11/2020	PG			
carcass classification challenges	1	2	30/11/2020	PG	30/11/2020	PG			

Figure 6.5.2 initial codes

After coding the codes, I identified wider themes to which the codes belonged, such as 'challenges facing farmers'. For example, a wider theme of challenges facing upland farmers was created, with sub-themes relating to political and economic challenges, social challenges, environmental, personal and COVID-19 related. Then numerous codes were linked to each theme. Figure 6.5.3 illustrates a hierarchy of some overarching themes and the sub-codes relating to the challenges facing farmers.

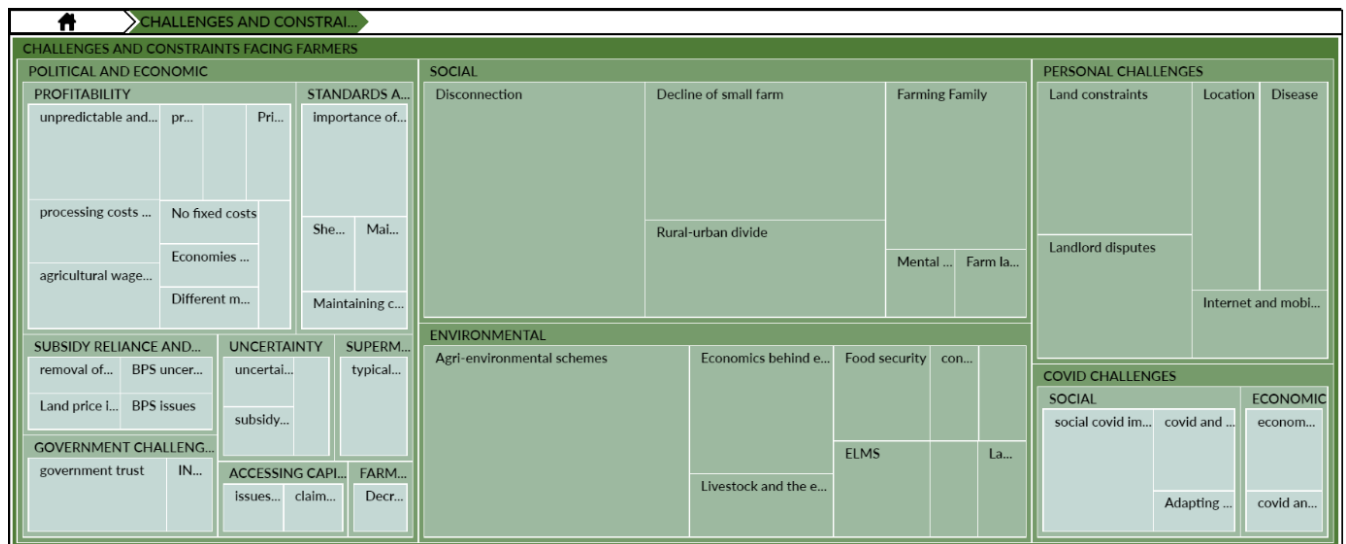


Figure 6.5.3 Theme generation (Author Generated)

After initial themes were generated, they were then analysed and refined. All of the codes generated can be categorised under three themes (stage five) which are discussed in the following chapter around the constraints and challenges facing upland farmers (See figure 6.5.4 below). Codes were created linking anything in the data to the (1) constraints and challenges facing farmers, (2) themes relating to anything [rural] entrepreneurship related and (3) approaches to strategic management in farming businesses. This coding structure helped form the basis for discussions around the personal, political and economic, social, environmental and COVID-19 related constraints discussed in the next chapter.

Name	Files	Referen...	Created on	Created...	Modified on	Modified by
▼ <input type="radio"/> CHALLENGES AND CONSTRAINTS FACING FA...	0	0	22 Oct 2020 at 10:...	PG	Today, 11:35	PG
▶ <input type="radio"/> COVID CHALLENGES	0	0	4 Nov 2020 at 09:50	PG	4 Nov 2020 at 09:51	PG
▶ <input type="radio"/> ENVIRONMENTAL	0	0	4 Nov 2020 at 13:02	PG	4 Nov 2020 at 13:03	PG
▶ <input type="radio"/> OPPURTUNITIES FOR FARMERS	0	0	1 Dec 2020 at 11:25	PG	1 Dec 2020 at 11:26	PG
▶ <input type="radio"/> PERSONAL FARM CHALLENGES	0	0	4 Nov 2020 at 13:19	PG	6 Jan 2021 at 11:29	PG
▶ <input type="radio"/> POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC	21	81	4 Nov 2020 at 13:16	PG	4 Nov 2020 at 13:40	PG
▶ <input type="radio"/> REQUIRED SUPPORT FOR BUSINESS GROW...	0	0	22 Oct 2020 at 11:52	PG	22 Oct 2020 at 11:52	PG
▶ <input type="radio"/> SOCIAL	0	0	4 Nov 2020 at 13:16	PG	4 Nov 2020 at 13:16	PG
▶ <input type="radio"/> THE IRON CAGE AND WEBERIAN THEORY	0	0	22 Oct 2020 at 19:01	PG	22 Oct 2020 at 19:...	PG
▼ <input type="radio"/> FARM ENTREPRENEURSHIP	1	2	22 Oct 2020 at 11:56	PG	Today, 11:34	PG
▶ <input type="radio"/> ATTITUDES TOWARDS ENTREPRENEURSHIP	1	1	5 Nov 2020 at 11:13	PG	19 Nov 2020 at 10:18	PG
▶ <input type="radio"/> CHARACTERISTICS	0	0	5 Nov 2020 at 11:03	PG	5 Nov 2020 at 11:03	PG
▶ <input type="radio"/> CONSTRAINED ENTREPRENEURSHIP	0	0	5 Nov 2020 at 11:09	PG	5 Nov 2020 at 11:09	PG
▶ <input type="radio"/> EXAMPLES OF FARM DIVERSIFICATION	0	0	5 Nov 2020 at 11:29	PG	5 Nov 2020 at 11:29	PG
▶ <input type="radio"/> FAMILY ENTREPRENEURSHIP	0	0	5 Nov 2020 at 11:40	PG	5 Nov 2020 at 11:40	PG
▶ <input type="radio"/> IDEA CREATION	1	1	5 Nov 2020 at 11:26	PG	24 Nov 2020 at 19:...	PG
▶ <input type="radio"/> INFORMAL ENTREPRENEURSHIP	1	1	5 Nov 2020 at 11:32	PG	24 Nov 2020 at 19:...	PG
▶ <input type="radio"/> MULTIPLE IDENTITIES OF FARMERS	0	0	22 Oct 2020 at 11:51	PG	5 Nov 2020 at 10:58	PG
▼ <input type="radio"/> STRATEGY	0	0	22 Oct 2020 at 10:14	PG	Today, 11:35	PG
▶ <input type="radio"/> DIVERSIFICATION ORIENTATED	1	2	5 Nov 2020 at 10:24	PG	23 Nov 2020 at 18:...	PG
▶ <input type="radio"/> EFFICIENCY ORIENTATED	1	2	5 Nov 2020 at 10:23	PG	20 Nov 2020 at 11:...	PG
▶ <input type="radio"/> ENVIRONMENTALLY DRIVEN	3	3	5 Nov 2020 at 10:46	PG	25 Nov 2020 at 11:...	PG
▶ <input type="radio"/> EXIT STRATEGY	0	0	5 Nov 2020 at 10:25	PG	5 Nov 2020 at 10:25	PG
▶ <input type="radio"/> FORCED OR NO STRATEGY	1	1	5 Nov 2020 at 10:23	PG	20 Nov 2020 at 11:...	PG
▶ <input type="radio"/> GROWTH ORIENTATED LAND SIZE LIVESTO...	0	0	5 Nov 2020 at 10:24	PG	5 Nov 2020 at 10:24	PG
▶ <input type="radio"/> SKILLSETS	1	1	22 Oct 2020 at 11:50	PG	22 Oct 2020 at 18:51	PG
▶ <input type="radio"/> SUCCESSION DRIVEN	3	5	5 Nov 2020 at 10:25	PG	24 Nov 2020 at 19:...	PG
▶ <input type="radio"/> SURVIVAL STRATEGIES	0	0	5 Nov 2020 at 10:25	PG	5 Nov 2020 at 10:25	PG
▶ <input type="radio"/> THOUGHTS ON STRATEGIES	8	13	22 Oct 2020 at 18:...	PG	1 Dec 2020 at 09:12	PG
<input type="radio"/> Types of Farmers	0	0	8 Jan 2021 at 09:11	PG	8 Jan 2021 at 09:11	PG
▶ <input type="radio"/> VIEWS OF THE FARM	0	0	5 Nov 2020 at 10:43	PG	5 Nov 2020 at 10:43	PG

Figure 6.5.4 (Reviewing the themes) (Author Generated)

The final stage in Braun and Clarke's analysis is to produce the report (stage six). This is in the form of presenting and discussing the themes generated from the thematic analysis. These themes are presented through using ideal types and the incorporation of case studies. An introduction to these data presentation methods is discussed in the following sections.

### 6.5.1 Presenting Qualitative Data

#### *Typologies*

The inclusion of a Weberian theoretical underpinning has helped shape this methodological design. To present the qualitative data from the multi-methods approach, “ideal types” are used.

Weber’s ideal types are tricky to use as he provided little information as to how to use them as analytical tools. Weber only discusses how to use ideal types twice across all of his work (Swedberg, 2018b). First, he discusses using them in the context of aiding historical analysis in his Objectivity essay, writing around twenty pages. Second, in *Economy and Society*, Weber only provided two and a half pages on using ideal types as a tool for sociological analysis in alignment with interpretative understanding (Weber, 1978:19). As this thesis draws on a sociological theoretical lens, Weber’s sociological ideal types are used.

In Weber’s view ideal types could be used to capture ‘the average or empirical meaning of several actors, in the case of the ideal type, he or she should use the constructed meaning of hypothetical actors’ (Swedberg and Agevall, 2016). This suggests that ideal types can be used to show pure typologies around how certain actors behave and can then be compared and contrasted with empirical reality. Weber (1978) argued sociology is concerned with producing ‘type concepts and general uniformities of empirical processes’, suggesting that the inclusion of ideal types as an analytical and data presentation tool aligns well with this study’s classical sociological lens.

Weber argued that sociological ideal types are constructed around two things. First, ‘adequacy on the level of meaning’ needs to be identified, which Swedberg and Agevall (2016:187) define as ‘a meaning has to be accomplished by the action it

implies'. For example, an actor decides on a meaning (i.e. gaining a friend's attention in the street) and then decides on an action to gain that person's attention (i.e. calling his name). Then, secondly, Weber argued the actor needs to make the ideal type as 'complete as possible' (Weber, 1978: 20), by heightening the meaning of the constructed ideal type by making a number of artificial meanings 'about the (typical) individual actor'. (Swedberg, 2018: 187). In other words, making a number of assumptions to construct the type in an ideal form. Weber (1978: 21-22) identifies four assumptions to do this:

- That the typical actor acts in a rational way;
- That the typical actor has complete information;
- That the typical actor is totally aware of what he/she is doing;
- That the typical actor does not make any mistakes.

These four points are used to construct an ideal type. It is important to stress that Weber's ideal types are not empirical reality, differing from how other scholars such as Elias (2012) who argued in favour of using 'real types' which are reflective of empirical reality. Rather ideals are constructed in a pure form that can then be analysed in relation to reality. For example, whilst farmer typologies have been created in the literature, such as the 'Good Farmer' (McGuire et al., 2013), 'Bad Farmer' and 'Rogue Farmers' (Smith et al., 2017), these are ideal types that various authors have constructed to typify some common characteristics of actor behaviours. For example, the 'Good Farmer' does not exist, it is an ideal type created in a pure form that can be contrasted with components of actual farmers. Ideal types should not be mistaken as empirical reality. Ideal types have been useful in helping to build and apply the entrepreneurship and strategic management theory (identified in chapter three) to the worlds of upland farmers.



By using ideal types, I can conceptualise upland farmers as entrepreneurs and as strategists. Ideal types allow me to create conceptually pure ideals relating to various things, such as farm strategies, farmer identities, and the nature of challenges facing farmers. These ideals can then be contrasted with the empirical data collected.

Within the data analysis phase, a number of different typologies were created, compared and contrasted with the empirical realities of farmers through the inclusion of case studies.

### *Case Studies*

The second part of Weberian ideal type analysis is to compare the theoretical constructs created with empirical reality. A combination of case studies and interview extracts can be used to do this, showing how the ideal types were created and exploring the differences between the ideal constructs and empirical reality.

Case studies can be used to present thick descriptions of events and the impact these events have to certain actors (i.e. farmers) (Yin, 2014). They can be utilised in the form of short and descriptive accounts with immense detail which leave a lasting impression on the reader's mind (Saunders et al., 2019). Case studies are utilised in chapter eight (section 8.2.1) and are used to discuss the theories, themes and concepts identified in the literature review in the context of upland farming. As a phenomenological/social constructionist approach underpins this study, concerning the lived experiences of upland farmers, case studies are used as an effective way to present the qualitative research data.

This combination of case studies and interview extracts fits well with the multi-methods design. Stories told by the participants are extracted from the interview data to illustrate prominent themes found. Moreover, using an insider approach allowed

me to create powerful stories that illustrate some of the themes created. The systematic combining of different methodological approaches within this thesis help bridge the gap between academic theory and practice, more details on this abductive process are now provided.

#### 6.5.2 Abductive analysis: systematic combining

The analytical approach within this study can be categorised as somewhat abductive in nature. Abductive reasoning involves the systematic combining of both inductive and deductive approaches to logic. Dubois and Gadde (2002:554) define systematic combining as 'a process where theoretical framework, empirical fieldwork, and case analysis evolve simultaneously'. Systematic combining allows researchers to switch back and forth between theory and investigations into empirical reality.

In the context of this research, whilst lots of data have been collected in an inductive manner, such as through serendipitous conversations with farmers and having a very loose interview schedule, it would be wrong to classify this thesis as wholly inductive. Some theoretical concepts have been identified prior in the literature review which are used to conceptualise upland farmers as entrepreneurs, such as those listed in the FSF. Moreover, Weber's iron cage metaphor has been used as the study's theoretical underpinning to examine the concept of 'constrained entrepreneurship' (de Bruin and Dupious, 2003) in the upland farm sector. This, undoubtedly, has influenced the analytical phase, as anything relating to the constraints facing farmers in relation to, bureaucracy for example, has exclusively been coded analysed.

This abductive approach aligns well with the multi-methods approach. Yin (1994) argues that any conclusions drawn will be 'much more convincing and accurate if they are based on several different sources of information following a corroborative mode'. I have been abductive in how I use my data collection tools, switching (becoming

involved and detached) when engaging in semi-structured phenomenological interviews in comparison to conversations when out in the field.

Dubois and Gadde (2002) identify two sources of data that are gathered through abductive approaches, (1) active and (2) passive data. Active data refers to data which the researcher is searching for i.e. organising interviews to understand the challenges facing farmers. Whilst passive data is found as a result of a non-linear or orchestrated process i.e. a serendipitous conversation with a farmer at an agricultural show. The use of multiple methods and an abductive approach allows me to capture this rich qualitative data.

Blumer (1954) a seminal scholar in the area of symbolic interactionism cited in the theoretical chapter (section 5.1.4), suggests theoretical concepts can be used almost as a guideline when immersing oneself within the empirical world of the social actors under investigation. Within qualitative research, these theoretical concepts do not have to be restrictive in nature, but rather be in the back of the researcher's mind when interviewing participants. For example, the adapted FSF comprises many theoretical concepts relating to farmer, farm and rural environment characteristics. To gain a profile of the farmer I was interviewing, I had first to understand various things about them i.e. age, location of farm, farm size, how he or she runs the farm etc. I engaged in an abductive approach by using the FSF throughout the interviewing and data analysis stages.

In comparison to deduction, where the aim is to test theory, or induction, where the aim is to generate broad theories (Saunders et al., 2019), abduction through systematically combining different approaches promotes theory development. Weber's iron cage metaphor is applied to a novel context of upland farming, allowing me to build upon the underexplored concept of 'constrained entrepreneurship' in the upland farm sector. This methodology chapter has given me the opportunity to discuss these existing pre-conceptions which underpin this work. An abductive

approach allows me to explore relevant theoretical concepts within an applied empirical context of upland farm management and extend existing theoretical debates.

## 6.6 Data Access, Sampling and Ethics

The following sections discuss data access, arguing how my positionality helped me overcome the challenges I faced. Sampling is discussed, detailing how a selection of non-probability techniques was used and allowed for data saturation. Finally, ethical concerns relating to this qualitative approach are discussed, highlighting some important considerations for researching farming contexts.

### 6.6.1 Data Access

Access to data is interesting in regard to this work. The scope is quite narrow in terms of the total population of upland farmers. There are around 109,000 farmers in the UK, with only 17% of UK's farmland comprising of Less Favour Area (LFA) i.e. suitable for upland/hill farming systems. These 109,000 figures is across all farming types (i.e., general cropping, horticulture, pig production *inter alia*) and across all the UK's devolved nations (England, Scotland, Wales, NI). The total number of English upland farmers is considerably lower, making access more difficult when compared to other research areas where the total population is greater.

I also encountered difficulties in gaining access to farmer participants, even as an insider. The following email is presented from a gate keeper:

“Your recent e mail has been passed on to me. Apologies for the delay in reply. We have a number of staff furloughed at the moment. If I may be frank with you, we are approached on a very regular basis by research students asking for access to our membership. It has got to the point where we are having to say

no as we don't have the resources to get involved to any degree. I do not in anyway seek to downplay the work you are doing or the very important subject you are tackling, but I'm being honest to say it is very difficult to get farmers to engage at this time."

Farmers can be notoriously hard to get in touch with. Most farm holders are of a higher age demographic, often being 65 years+. Many do not have mobile phones or are difficult to get in touch with due to poor signal. Many farmers do not have a strong social media presence either, making it especially challenging at a time of COVID-19 when all farmer interactions, such as country fairs and livestock markets, have either been suspended or limited due to social distancing. This has made gaining access incredibly difficult, even for an 'industry insider'. Also, as farmers are business owners and entrepreneurs too, setting aside time during the working day, especially in the British summertime, has an economic impact. Farmers face heavy seasonal workloads, and the impact of the pandemic has created access issues.

I managed to overcome these constraints by remaining resilient throughout. Whilst in the email above it shows the difficulties in research students gaining access to farmer participants, I was offered an opportunity to share my call for participants on a farming social media group. I took him up on this offer. I also tried alternative methods, I reached out to farmers over social media and online farming forum platforms. I sent out emails in weekly online farming newsletters. I used my own contacts. I asked each farmer interviewed if they could recommend (snowball) any other farmers who would be willing to talk to me (Saunders et al., 2019). In return, I was met with lots of willing participants but also many who did not reply. I respected their time for taking part in this study, listened to their concerns and for those interested, offered to share my results with them once published.

### 6.6.2 Sampling

Both the purposive and snowball nonprobability sampling techniques were used (Saunders et al., 2019). This approach worked well, and I gained diversity amongst the sample. In total 30 semi-structured interviews were carried out, ranging from 30 to 90 minutes (table 6.4), 30 conversations, 1 entry per week into my research diary and over 800+ photographs.

In terms of sample size, the number of participants interviewed aligns with other qualitative research methodologies in farming contexts (McKeever et al., 2014; Smith et al., 2020), and supports Morse (1994) and Creswell's (1998) adequate sample size in phenomenological and ethnographic studies. While some may argue sample size is of great importance in qualitative methodologies, I believe researchers should be aiming more for data saturation instead of hitting a sample target. Guest et al. (2006) regards data saturation as the point when no new information is being generated from the sample, arguing it can be reached in as little as six interviews. After 30 in-depth interviews, I felt saturation had been achieved.

### 6.6.3 Ethics, anonymity and confidentiality.

Research ethics refers to researchers' ability to minimise harm (Saunders et al., 2019). Harm in this context relates to physical, economic or social harm. This type of social science research possesses minimal to no harm to the researcher, participants, or anyone connected with the study.

Physical harm was extremely unlikely: interviews were carried out over the phone. Some conversations did take place on farms when working in the field. However, living on an active hill farm, appropriate measures are always taken to avoid physical harm.

In regard to economic harm, precautionary steps were taken to ensure that the farmers interviewed did not suffer any unnecessary economic harm for taking part in this study. A suitable time to conduct phone interviews were arranged at the convenience of participants. Additionally, all farmers were asked to provide informed consent to participate in the study, which outlined how their data would be used and how they're free to withdraw from the study. Farmers have well known seasonal work patterns, the majority of the farmer interviews were conducted prior to 'mowing season' i.e., July 15<sup>th</sup> onwards, and the other interviews were conducted either in early mornings or late evening, when farmers are less busy during the working day.

Social harm is important to consider in rural communities, as many farmers live in rurally isolated locations and mental health is a challenge in UK agriculture. Therefore, it is important to treat farmers with integrity and anonymise any data. Farmers live-in close-knit communities and can face difficult economic times and might not want their personal information to be leaked into the wider [rural] communities. All farmers were given pseudonyms to protect their individual identities. All interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim following consent, alongside each participant was informed of their rights to withdraw. Full details of this can be found in the accompanying ethics form (appendix A).

## 6.7 Reflections

Reflective practices are often used within qualitative research methodologies as a means to validate the research approach (Mortari, 2015). Indeed, some scholars criticise reflection in academic research, regarding it as a 'narcissistic practice' and 'self-indulgent' process (Konstantoni and Early, 2016). However, in phenomenological studies, reflection allows researchers to reflect on the voice of the participants and reflect on the deeper theoretical and methodological issues within the research process.

I believe reflection has played a crucial role in helping me justify my own methodological approach and has strengthened my claim of a methodological contribution to the farm entrepreneurship literature. In this chapter, I have reflected deeply on the methods used, reflecting on my philosophical influences and assumptions. I have reflected on how I have carried out my data collection and analysis protocols. In addition to this, I have reflected on how I have developed professionally as a researcher. However, there some deeper reflections also emerged.

Although I have argued throughout this chapter the value of utilising the industry insider approach, I feel embarking on the PhD has changed me as an individual. The more I engage in securing an academic research career, in particular if my research interest move me away from empirical methodologies in farming research and I engage with deep philosophical and theoretical research questions, I may find my positionality changing. To the point where I effectively transform from an insider to almost an outsider, becoming more and more disconnected from farming communities.

Involvement and detachment (Elias, 1985) are two concepts that have acted as a methodological underpinning in helping me manage my positionality as an industry insider. I have remained more involved and attached during certain aspects of the research process. While much of the work concerns exploring the subjective issues facing farmers, there have been times where I had to maintain a level of objectivity. I know of some of the realities facing farmers as I have personally experienced them, however, whilst my insider positionality certainly helps me gain access to farmers, sharing my own personal views with a farmer can influence the conversation, sometimes in a negative way. For example, once I asked a question on an online farming forum about 're-wilding', a controversial topic in farming, and some responses questioned my legitimacy of being a farmer. This is where I experienced the



importance of balance and becoming involved and detached in the research process at given times.

Indeed, there are times in which my positionality can aid the research process, whilst at other times it can, if uncontrolled, be a hindrance. Smith et al. (2020) notes the ancient Chinese philosophical lens and symbol 'Yin-Yang' as a means of conceptualising the everyday realities farmers face, taking the good with the bad. I think this 'Yin-Yang' lens equally can be used to conceptualise achieving balance in the research process, in particular around balancing my role as an industry insider and the methods I have used to research the complex world in which farmers live and work within. Using a multi-methods approach helps me achieve this balance, auto-ethnography has been labelled as a 'narcissistic approach to research' (Stephens-Griffin and Griffin, 2019:1), and I think a wholly auto-ethnographic approach could possibly be interpreted a narcissistic, but engaging in reflexivity through a research diary, alongside engaging in interviews and conversations with farmers and agricultural industry stakeholders has allowed me to achieve balance.

Reflecting upon my methodology, as with any research design, there are many implications and potentially some objections that can be anticipated. Interpretivism can be critiqued from a materiality perspective, it may be argued that interpretivists mainly have a human-centric ontology, suggesting that interpretivists focus on the human-element too much (i.e., the individual) but disregard interactions humans have with material objects in the world. The framing around Weber's notion of *verstehen* focuses this study on analysing the subjective and relative experiences of farmers. However, in some ways I have attempted to explore how farmers interact with the material world through incorporating symbolic interactionism, to not only explore the relative challenges facing farmers, but also understand the meanings farmers attach to certain objects within the environment and how objects acquired by farmers relate to entrepreneurial identities. Additionally, I incorporate other levels of

units of analysis outside the individual, such as the farm business and rural environment in which farmers operate within. However, by no means is the critique of a human-centric ontology entirely resolved by reference to symbolic interactionism.

## 6.8 Chapter Summary

Throughout this chapter, I have justified the chosen methodology. I have argued that this thesis makes a methodological contribution to farm entrepreneurship research through utilising an 'industry insider' approach. The research questions have been re-introduced alongside the research design employed to answer them. My ontological, epistemological and axiological positioning has been presented in regard to an interpretative research design. A detailed description of the various research locations was provided in accordance with the ethnographic nature of the study. Multiple data collection strategies are used in alignment with a mixture of phenomenological, ethnographic and case study strategies. Insight into the data analysis protocols is shared, arguing why an abductive approach to data analysis is used to best answer the study's research questions. Finally, I reflect on various components of the outlined methodology and present some reflections. The next chapter presents and discusses the findings from the thematic analysis of the empirical data.

## Chapter Seven: Heterogeneity in the English Uplands



### 7.0 Introduction

The findings chapters are split into two parts. In this chapter, the results from the empirical phase of the thesis are presented and discussed in relation to existing literature. These findings result from the multi-methodological approach outlined in the prior chapter, consisting of qualitative data gathered through semi-structured interviews, *ad-hoc* conversations, photographs taken in the field and research diary entries. The qualitative data have been analysed in NVivo and are presented throughout this chapter, aiming to respond to the research aim i.e. an exploration into the lived experiences of English upland farmers in the beef and sheep sector.

This chapter is separated into five sections. First, the upland FSF is revisited as a significant component of this chapter draws on its features to discuss the realities facing farmers (Section 7.1). Second, the personal and trait-based characteristics (Carland et al., 1988) of upland farmers in the thesis are explored, looking at the role of the farmer in relation to entrepreneurial activities (Section 7.2). Third, the business characteristics relating to upland farms are then explored, underpinned by a behavioural approach to entrepreneurship (Gartner, 1988), looking at the types of businesses [entrepreneurial] farmers create. Fourth, the business activities and

processes connected to upland farming enterprises analysed within this study are then explored (Section 7.4). Indeed, farm diversification was found to be a common strategy used by the more entrepreneurially orientated farmers in the sample. However, there were some exceptions, some farmers utilised entrepreneurial, innovative, and strategic thinking in their commercial activities and wanted to avoid farm diversification strategies as it conflicted with their own personal farming identities, views of the farm family and their strategic visions. Overall, analysing the empirical data in relation to the different features of the framework allowed multiple units of analysis relating to farmers and their businesses to be explored, helping to conceptualise upland farmers as entrepreneurs and as strategists. Finally, an overview of the main challenges facing farmers is then presented, showing both the macro and micro level constraints facing farmers today (Section 7.5).

## 7.1 Recalling the Upland Farmer Segmentation Framework

Throughout this chapter, the three layers of the adapted FSF are discussed in relation to the empirical findings. These layers are the personal characteristics of farmers, farm business characteristics and the business activities and processes connected to the [upland] farm enterprise. An analysis of different levels of units of analysis, allows for a deeper understanding of entrepreneurial phenomena within certain contexts (Low and Macmillan, 1988). Figure 7.1 (p.108) illustrates the farmer segmentation framework. Some of the prominent categories on each layer are now discussed in relation to this work to present a key finding: great heterogeneity exists amongst English upland farmers, which has implications for policymakers. Overall, the sample is representative of the wider upland farming community, with farmers of different genders, age ranges, educational backgrounds and geographical locations. Efforts have been put into place to ensure that a broader sample representative of the different types of upland farmers have been included in this research. The average age of a

farmer in the UK is 59 (Henriques, 2021), as demonstrated in the FSF a wide variety of farmers of different ages were interviewed, taking into consideration the views of new entrants, medium term farmers and experienced/generational farmers. As a result of this age variance, some of the farmers interviewed have pursued formal education (i.e., college/university), while some of the older farmers have received limited education. Finally, this research also included the viewpoints of female farmers, who only make up 28% of the British agricultural workforce, yet play a pivotal role in the strategic direction of the farm enterprise (Jervell, 2011). The factors listed in the FSF could then be analysed, understanding the role certain background influences have in regard to entrepreneurial farm business strategies.

## 7.2 Personal Characteristics of Upland Farmers

Understanding the personal characteristics of individuals, known as the 'trait-based approach' in the entrepreneurship literature (Gartner, 1988), is essential to understand approaches to farm entrepreneurship. The trait-based approach is worth re-visiting: according to Carland et al. (1988), it tells a story around the entrepreneur running the enterprise, showing the skills, competencies and background which influence their business ventures.

These personal characteristics are now discussed in relation to the empirical findings. An overview of how the adapted farmer segmentation framework has been used in the NVivo analysis can be seen in table 7.2 below. Using the FSF allowed me to gain essential background and contextual information around each participant. It allowed me to develop a profile amongst each farmer's different demographic features, which could then be compared and contrasted. The FSF has proved to be a powerful analytical tool throughout this research. The characteristic of gender is discussed first, as it was found to be a distinctive factor associated with entrepreneurial activity.

Name	Gender	Age	Education	Experience	Ownership status
Amy	Female	20-29	Undergraduate level	5-10 years	Owner
Chris	Male	30-39	College/A-level	5-10 years	Owner
Dr. Jacob	Male	40-49	PhD holder	10-20 years	Tennant
Duncan	Male	70-79	No education	20+ years	Owner
Isaac	Male	30-39	Undergraduate level	10-20 years	Owner

Table 7.2 Profiling farmers through the segmentation framework (Author Generated)

### 7.2.1 Gender: Is farming still a male dominated industry?

“Well, I always wanted to be a farmer, but I wasn’t from a farming background. I am at the grand old age of 73 now and am still working... Like most hill farmers I couldn’t count the number of hours that I have spent dozing with sheep. Well, you know what it’s like living on a farm. It’s always what I’ve wanted to do but I wasn’t born into it you see.”

The above quote from Margaret shows the realities of one female farmer who entered the farming sector in a traditionally male-dominated era. The role of women in agriculture is an important, yet under-researched area of study. Much farm entrepreneurship research does not comment exclusively on the role of farm women in the business (Hansson et al., 2013). It may be argued that culturally speaking, farming has been socially constructed as a masculine construct (Olson and Currie, 1992). In the literature, it was found that the role of women in farming businesses (i.e.,

farm wives, daughter) is lacking in research terms (Saugeres, 2002). The role of gender has not been omitted from this research, contributing to this knowledge gap in the context of upland farm entrepreneurship.

This thesis illustrates the important role women play in upland farming enterprises. Six of the twenty farmers interviewed were female. Throughout the fieldwork, I had many spontaneous conversations with women farmers and agricultural stakeholders who worked in various roles, such as chartered surveyors, lawyers and finance managers. These encounters led me to write several reflections in my research diary. I was recently reading an autobiography of a female shepherd from the Lake District, Hannah Jackson (aka The Red Shepherdess), and an interesting quote from the book jumped out at me, which I recorded in my research diary:

‘I’m the Red Shepherdess: the hard-worn, bad-ass contract shepherd and farmer with Fraser, the top-dog that everyone respects, at my heel. No one in these hills would dare ask me: ‘So, what is it like to be a female shepherd?’ And yet this is the very question I have had to answer time and time again through every single step of my career so far. Do you think these hills or animals ever cared that I am a woman?’ (Jackson, 2021:4).

I found the line from the quote ‘No one in these hills would dare ask me’ interesting, it suggests to me that women farmers have had to work hard to prove to people that they can farm just as well, or even better, than male farmers who are often never questioned about their gender within the industry. In some retrospect, there appears to be a battle for some women farmers to be taken seriously, a battle to be considered a legitimate farmer one might even say. The quote highlights public and media interest in the role of women in agriculture. Yet, perhaps due to my industry insider positionality, as opposed to those outsiders (i.e., journalists), I never felt the need to explicitly ask women farmers ‘what is it like to be a female farmer?’ Rather, I would

let women farmers tell me of the challenges facing them, which were largely the same constraints facing male farmers i.e., profitability issues, social challenges, responding to covid etc. Interestingly, none of the female farmers interviewed explicitly noted gender as a constraint in running their farm businesses. Although the women farmers interviewed did not explicitly state they faced gender-related challenges, I sensed that many female farmers were often questioned more than men about why they entered the farming sector (as evidenced by the quote from the red shepherdess above). Sarah also noted that her farming practices were viewed as being unconventional from the more traditionalist male farmers in her local area:

“in all honesty some of the things that we are doing on the farm are not in alignment with traditional farming practices, there were quite a lot of scaving comments”

I spent a lot of time thinking about how women in agricultural roles have been perceived and changed over recent years. Much of this reflection happened after visiting the Cumbrian Lake District on holiday with my family and after conducting phone interviews with several female farmers.





Photograph 4 Two female farmers in the Lake District stopping traffic from moving their flock into another field (Author Generated)

In Cumbria, whilst driving over the brow of a hill on a country road, I was waived down by some farm workers (photograph 4) so they could safely move a flock of sheep

across the road. On arriving at our glamping pod on a Cumbrian hill farm, I was greeted by a female farmer. She said to me, “I’m Lucy I look after all the touristy stuff on the farm. That’s my husband over there driving the Fergy [Massey Ferguson], he’s the miserable sod who looks after the farm.” I found this interesting, as it resonates with what McElwee (2006a) wrote in his paper, who suggests that it is often the farm women who initiate farm diversification strategies, while male farmers typically handle the day-to-day core activities. This notion of women farmers instigating diversification strategies was also found across the interview data, Gordon states:

“By far my best strength has been my wife who does all the paperwork that I can’t do. She is excellent at it. Whereas I can walk around with my head in the clouds, she will sit down and justify my ideas. We analyse whether an idea is any good or not. She is my biggest strength. She tends to come up with all the ideas. We see an opportunity and we take it, if it doesn’t work it doesn’t matter and we’ll just wait till the next one comes along.” (See Appendix 2 for transcript)

The extract from Gordon’s interview signifies that women connected to farming enterprises can have high levels of influence and power in the business direction (Jervell, 2011), suggesting that their role within farming management research should not be underestimated. During my stay in the Lake District, I reflected on the role of women in agricultural roles with my fiancé. We spoke about various high profile names in the agricultural sector, such as ‘the Yorkshire shepherdess’ (<https://www.yorkshireshepherdess.com/amanda-owen/>) , Hannah Jackson (<https://redshepherdess.co.uk/>) and the president of the NFU, Minette Batters (<https://www.nfuonline.com/about-us/nfu-whos-who/minette-batters-nfu-president/>). An entry from my research diary shows these reflections:

‘After talking with my dad, I realised how much the perceptions of women in agricultural roles seemed to have changed over the recent years. On our farm, my dad was telling me about how all the farm women, his wife (my mum), his mum and the children would live in a separate house together on the farm. The men in the household would live in the farmhouse. The farm women would look after the children, sometimes helping out with minor farm activities and handle all the cooking and cleaning’  
(August 2020).

#### Personal Reflection

Today, this image appears very traditionally orientated and rather sexist, the role of women farmers and farm women is now, to a certain extent being popularised through media attention. Most of the women farmers interviewed seemed to be entrepreneurially orientated compared to the male farmers, having an active role in the core farm activities and initiating and running farm diversification activities. A case study in the following chapter illustrates the entrepreneurial capabilities of one female farmer (Section 8.2.4). It may even be argued that women farmers tend to be more entrepreneurial than male farmers, the evidence from this research suggests so, but a larger scale study is required to investigate this further.

The interview data shows how the view of a traditionally male-dominated agricultural industry is being challenged. It has been highlighted in the media, but it is also seen when out and about in rural areas, whereby women have more of an active role on family farms than they previously did, historically speaking. Women are especially important in regard to initiating and pursuing diversification activities, whilst also playing an active role in running the primary activities of the farm. The findings here are in line with the work of McElwee (2006), Barbieri and Mahoney

(2009) and Jervell (2011) who highlight the important role women play in agricultural businesses. Moreover, from this small sample size, women upland farmers are more entrepreneurial than the male farmers interviewed. Whilst gender was found to be an important characteristic, age was found to be particularly important too.

### 7.2.2 Age of farm holder

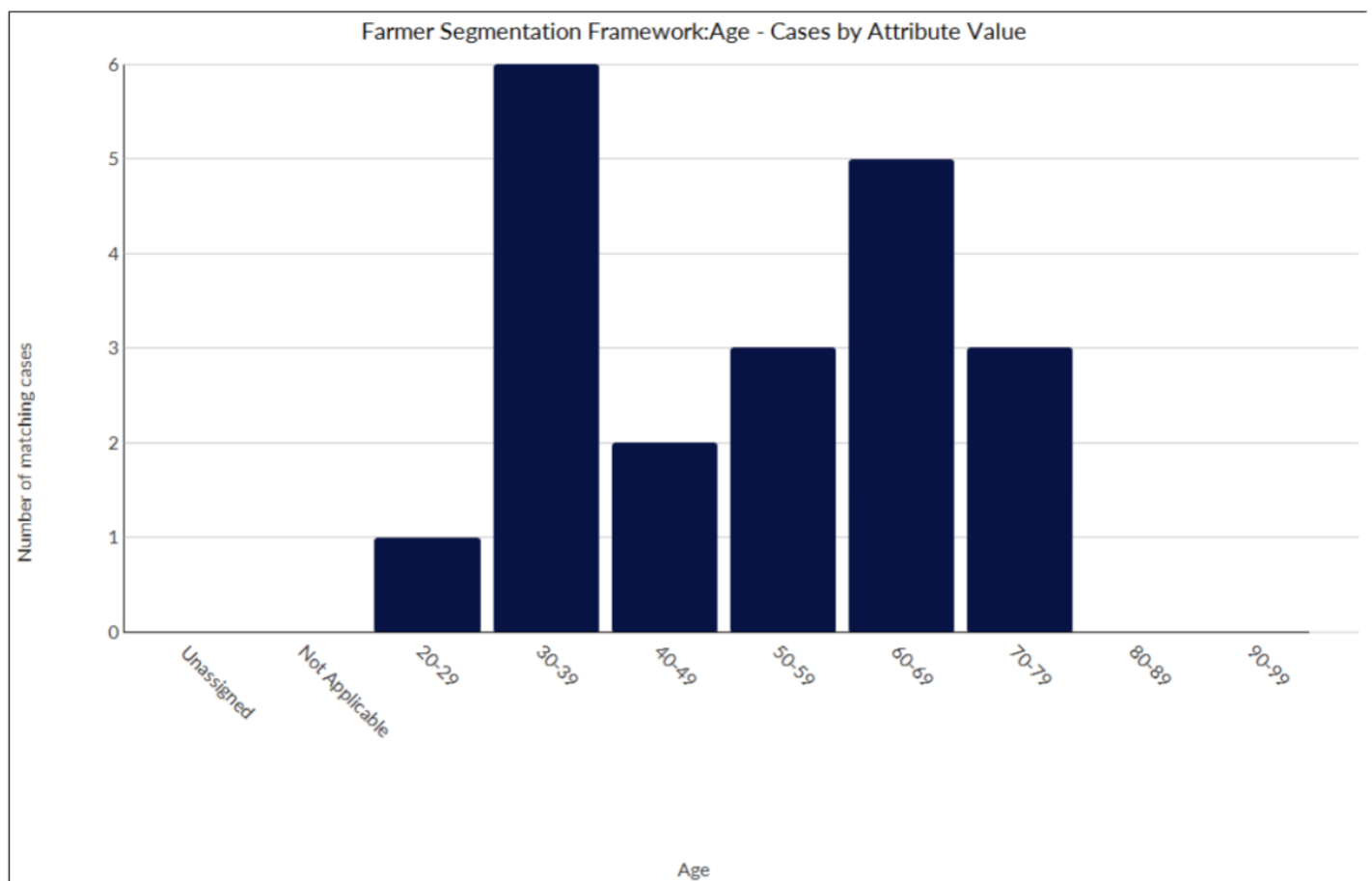


Figure 7.2.2 age distribution of farmer interviewees

Lévesque and Minniti (2011) suggest that entrepreneurial intentions of individuals tend to peak between the ages of 25 and 34 years old. The farming sector in the UK has an ageing workforce, with the average age of a farmer being 59 (Henriques, 2021).

Many of the older farmers regarded themselves as being not entrepreneurially orientated. A mix of ages was present (figure 7.2.2), eight farmers were over sixty, one can be considered a 'young farmer' (aged 20-29), with the most common age bracket being between thirty and forty years old.

Typically, the older farmers were less entrepreneurially orientated and less concerned about how their farming business will adapt under the DAP. 67-year-old Mike states:

"I'm not worried about things anymore at my age. All this that's happening with the subsidies, it's a young person problem."

There could be many reasons as to why older farmers had this mindset. One reason could be that older farmers have managed to reach a position within their farming enterprise where they are economically stable and can continue running until they decide to retire. Some farmers had successors in place, such as their sons and daughters and thought that once the subsidies are removed, then they can take over the farming enterprise and deal with any problems that arise.

However, there did appear to be a somewhat 'us versus them' mentality present between the younger and older farmers. Oliver comments:

"You see the older farmers have made their money when the going was good. They have had the hard times, so the single farm payment is secondary to them. The older generation, those in their sixties and seventies, I think if they stopped single farm payment, they are the ones who are more likely to survive."

One younger farmer went as far to say that the older generation farmers were 'born into a state of luxury'. It is evident that age can be a barrier to entrepreneurial activity in farming businesses, which is reflected in this study's findings. UK policymakers

have recognised the connections between age and entrepreneurship, creating the lump-sum exit scheme, providing farmers with their remaining BPS entitlements early in an effort to free up agricultural land and attract new entrants to the sector (Defra, 2021). Whilst Defra do not explicitly state this is a way of removing older and more traditionally orientated farmers, it may be an incentive for farmers, who might be struggling and approaching retirement age, to consider leaving the industry and allow younger and more entrepreneurially orientated farmers to replace them. Discussions around this policy change are returned to in chapter nine (section 9.3.3).

Interestingly, one finding that conflicts with the idea that entrepreneurial orientation declines with age is present in one farmer interview. Seventy-year-old Gordon who runs a diversified wool collection business states “you’ve got to be entrepreneurial if you want to survive for as long as I have”. This entrepreneurial spirit seemed to be inspired by his son’s involvement in the farming business, who set up a very successful wool collection service over the lockdown periods. This highlights the role of family involvement in entrepreneurial activity as highlighted by Jervell (2011), showing that whilst age barriers may be a constraint to entrepreneurial activities, family members can (if permitted by the primary decision-maker) initiate entrepreneurial strategies to respond to the challenges within the sector. In contrast, one younger farmer I had a conversation with told me he often finds that the entrepreneurial ideas he has are rejected by his father, due to his age and lack of seniority in the farm business.

It is evident that age can be both a facilitator and constraint in farming businesses. The farming sector has an ageing workforce, which impacts how farmers orientate their farming businesses. The role of family can be a means of overcoming these age constraints. However, it can also be a potential constraint. Age was clearly important in both attitudes towards entrepreneurship and approaches to strategy, typically younger farmers gave more thought to the long-term direction of the farming

enterprise and pursued more entrepreneurial business strategies, however, education also influenced the strategies used by farmers.

### 7.2.3 Education

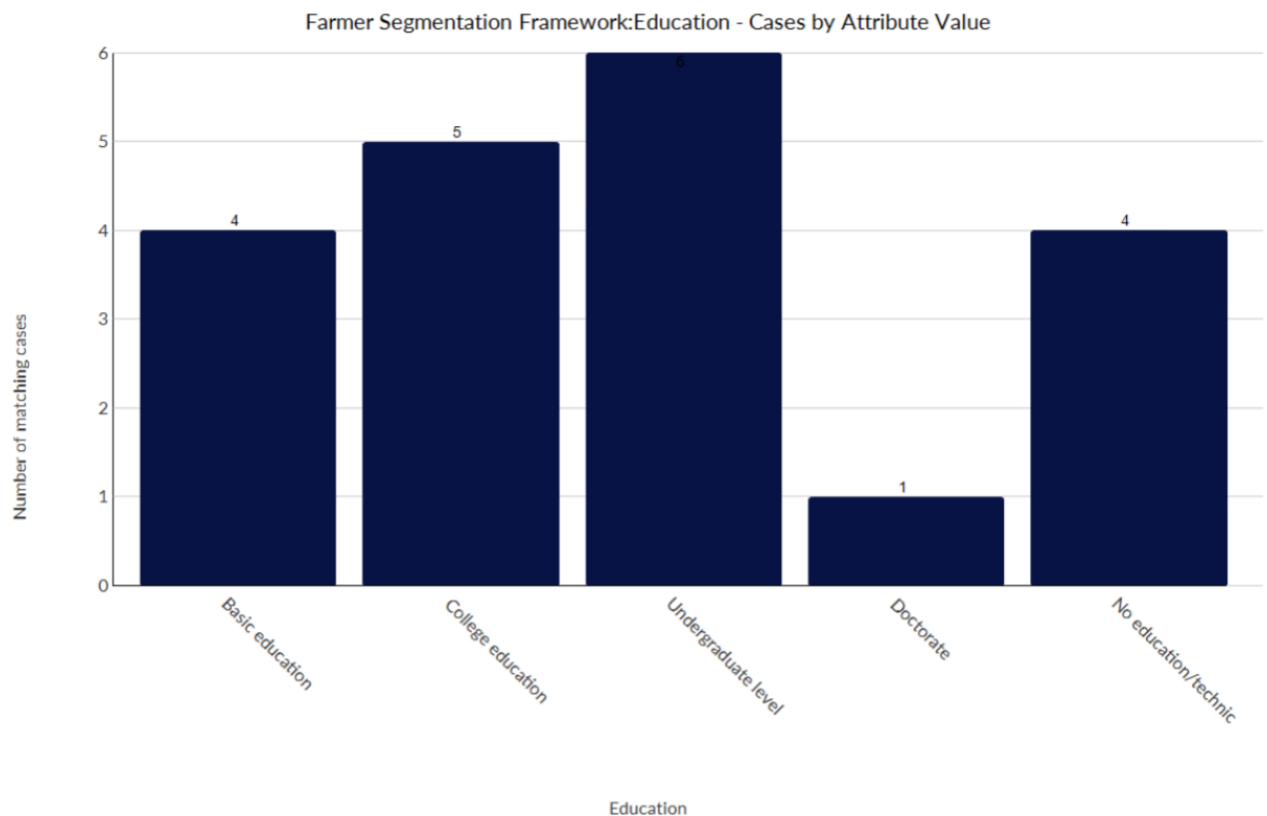


Figure 7.2.3 education (author generated)

Education is important to consider as this can influence the nature of skill sets and management approaches adopted by farmers. There is a limited body of literature that has looked at the role of education in relation to farm entrepreneurship (Kalirajan and Shand, 1985; Santiago and Roxas, 2015; Smith et al., 2020) McElwee and Bosworth (2011) found that farmers who had received a formal education typically pursued diversification strategies, a finding also noted in this sample.

Many of the older aged farmers interviewed left school at an early age (around 14) and took up full-time roles on their family farms. They tended to be more traditionally orientated farmers, often avoiding farm diversification strategies and generally lacked entrepreneurial skillsets and strategic thinking capabilities (Heracleous, 1998). Whereas those degree educated farmers appear to be more entrepreneurially orientated (McElwee, 2006), undertaking various on and off farm diversification strategies and using what they have learned through their university studies to introduce innovation to the farm business.

Interestingly Jacob, who holds a doctorate, appeared to be one of the most entrepreneurially orientated farmers interviewed. Jacob's farming business revolves around rearing and direct selling premium mutton to independent restaurants. He regards his entrepreneurial approach as being a result of his outsider experience:

"A lot of farmers become traditionalised in that you do what you learnt because that's what you learnt. And it is often hard for them to rationalise why they are doing that particular thing... Had I grown up the son of a hill farmer and inherited a hill farm and what have you, I probably wouldn't be entrepreneurial."

Whilst Jacob's business is livestock focused, he serves a niche end of the market. Instead of commercially breeding sheep and selling them at auction for around £50 to £80 per head, he directly sells premium mutton to independent restaurants. Through direct selling, Jacob sells his mutton carcasses for around £300 per head and also runs farm walks for new entrants into farming, sharing his own experiences of entering the sector as an outsider. Jacob regards his entrepreneurial nature as coming from his outsider experience and educational background, allowing him to think like a businessman, not a farmer (Couzy and Dockes, 2008). He states:



“If you run one of those a month [farm walk], it is potentially bringing in an extra £4000 per year. Which given the marginal profitability of many hill farms, it is nothing to shy away from. If the farmer has some teaching skills or is very personal, then it is potentially a very easy way of boosting income. Because you can do this with other things, such as wildflower meadow walks...”

For Jacob, access to land was a constraint, meaning he had to think about generating income through alternative methods, such as direct selling and farm walks. It is clear then that education had a positive impact on how Jacob runs his farming business. However, as Jacob is a tenant farmer and runs a smallholding, the current institutional conditions (i.e., BPS) do not favour him, at present he regards himself as “just about profitable at the minute.”

While education was important for some farmers, it was not a necessity for all. Some farmers were critical of the skillsets which can be learnt through educational courses and the applicability to upland farming. Indeed, the role of education in running a successful farming business is complicated. Many of the farmers across the sample with no formal education or training have built and ran successful farming businesses. Agricultural education appeared to be a path for some but not for all. Those farmers who were born into a farming family and had farm connections were often pressured into taking up work in the family farm instead of receiving an education, Nick states:

“Dad had us quite late in life, he was in his forties before he even started a family, so when my brother and me were coming up to finishing college and school, it was sort of the case where if we wanted to come home to the farm that was the time to do it, instead of going travelling.”

While discussions around outsider status’ (i.e., a non-agricultural background) are discussed by Kuehne (2016) in the context of interviewing farmers, it has not been

explored in regard to the role it has to farm entrepreneurship. There are both pros and cons to being born into a farming family. Insiders are engrained in farming cultures, they have connections to a farm which they can utilise for employment. However, outsiders, whilst not necessarily having connections and experience, are able to apply new methods and approaches to farming activities. Simon, whilst being born into a farming family, tells me of his experience in temporarily leaving the family farm to pursue some contract work in New Zealand:

“It changed our perspectives a lot, allowing us to start rotational grazing. We brought that back home with us, and we’ve been tailoring it ever since. It’s a continual learning curve. We’ve made a huge number of changes around splitting up fields and learning how and when to move them and how many to leave behind and what happens at the end of the year. So, it generally means we are in a better grass position than our neighbours who don’t rotationally graze.”

This outsider experience allowed Simon to come back home and implement innovative farming methods (i.e., rotational grazing) on his own farm, thus improving his grassland management. Without this outsider experience, his farm would not be as efficient as it is today. However, while outsider experience can be beneficial and allow farmers to run more economically sustainable businesses, these new methods and practices must be accepted and implemented in the farming business.

The youngest farmer in the sample, Amy, informed me that whilst she values her educational experience at Harper Adams University, her siblings and parents often reject her ideas due to her age and lack of seniority. The implications for this are that whilst educational and outsider experience are important, they must be accepted and implemented by the primary decision makers involved in the farming business. Therefore, knowledge learnt through outsider experiences is often challenged by farm

family members, with primary decision-makers (i.e., traditionalist farmers) acting as constraints to innovative and entrepreneurial strategies. Effective farm management decision making is essential in getting entrepreneurial ideas accepted.

The findings of this section highlight how the educational backgrounds of farmers can be both facilitators and constraints in farming businesses. Some paradoxical findings have emerged in this section. Whilst those more entrepreneurially orientated farmers tended to have a formal education, as found in Dickson et al. (2008) and McElwee and Bosworth's (2011) work, by no means were entrepreneurial farmers as successful as some of the traditionalist farmers. Knowledge learnt through educational and outsider experiences were often constrained by the farm family. Decision-making was found to be a constraint and is often linked to other issues like ownership status.

### 7.2.4 Ownership Status

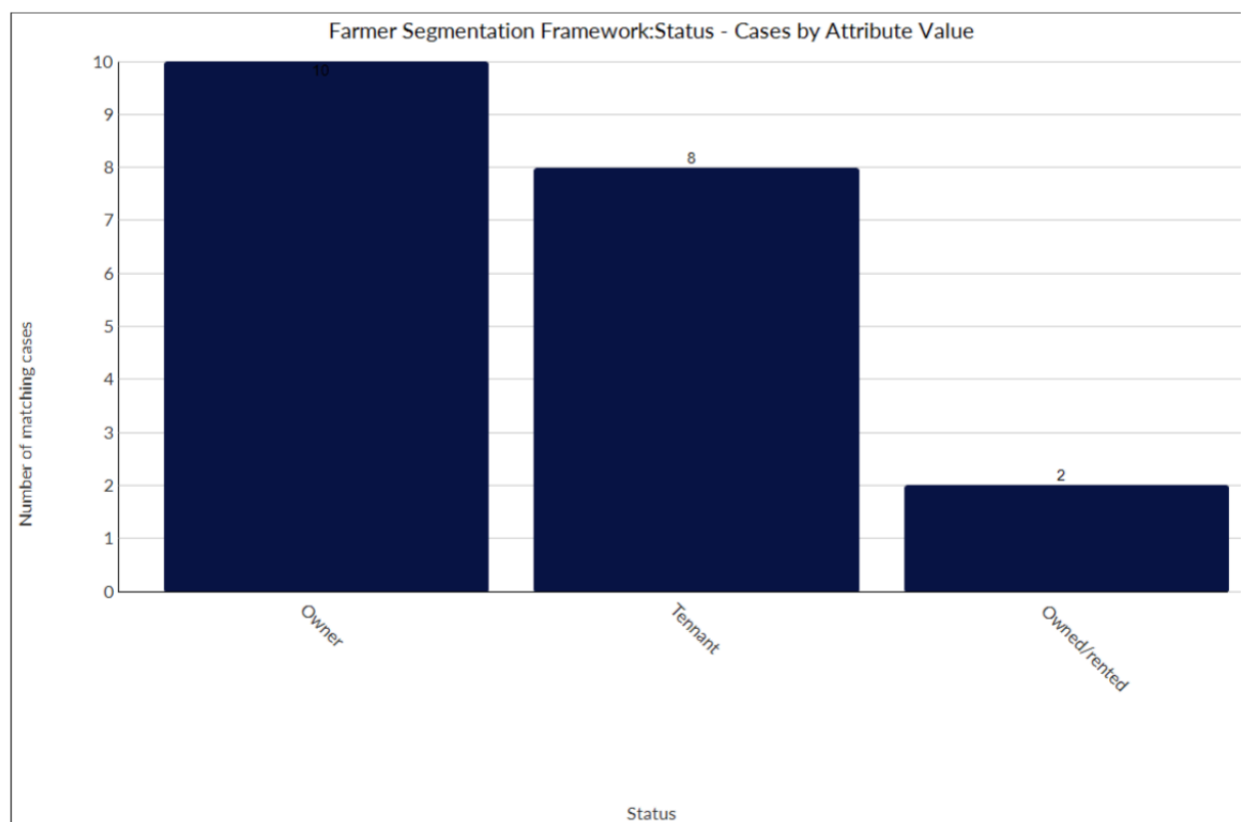


Figure 7.2.4 Ownership status (Author Generated)

Farm ownership statuses can be categorised under three types, ownership, tenanted or a mixture of owned and tenanted land. The type of ownership appeared to play a role in the nature of constraints relating to the farm business. Some studies have explored the challenges facing tenant farmers, such as Maye et al. (2009) who found that diversification activities tended to be more prominent on tenanted farms. However, few studies compare ownership statuses and challenges present between owned and tenanted farms.

It is apparent through the interview findings that farmers with different ownership statuses were subjected to relative constraints. Many of the farmers who owned their farms outright viewed this as a significant strength to their business. Mike states:

“Because we own our own farm, we can make some profits on our sheep... I’m not quite sure how tenant farmers manage it though, having to give their subsidies to their landlords.”

Owner occupiers did not have to seek permissions for undertaking farm activities from a landlord. Some tenant farmers noted toxic landlord relationships as a constraint, as Josh’s case study in the following chapter shows (Section 8.2). It was found that some landlords were not particularly supportive of tenants diversifying, as it conflicted with their own views. Some landlords were more concerned with the way the tenants ran the farm and engaged in micromanagement.

However, some farmers had positive relationships with their landlords who took progressive steps in helping them run their farming businesses. Some farmers were able to deal with landlord concerns directly, allowing them to work out the best way to run the farming businesses. Whilst other farmer-landlord relationships were more complex, with some farmers having to employ land agents and deal with large scale landlords such as the National Trust and the Ministry of Defence. Some landlords appeared to be more reactive in nature, Richard states:

“We just let sleeping dogs lie with them... I am sensible, I don’t give my landlords any reasons to cause problems”.

Interestingly, two farmers had both farm business tenancies and owned farms. Owning/renting multiple farmers appeared to be particularly beneficial, Nick states:

“that’s the beauty in having both the upland and lowland farm, we can take everything right through to finish. We are in a lucky position which most upland farmers aren’t in. We can breed the stock in the upland farm and take finishing stock down to the lowland farm.”

Having both an upland and a lowland farm allows Nick to maximize efficiency and reach economies of scale. He effectively has control over both the breeding and fattening stages of the livestock production process. However, Nick notes challenges in conflicting views of strategic direction between him and his landlord:

“You are trying to do what’s best for yourself as a business but also you have to keep an eye over your shoulder of what the landlord wants. And they don’t always tell you what they want or make it clear what they want, until after you have done something which they don’t like.”

Many constraints were associated with farm ownership status, relating to relationships between farmers, landlords, families and banks. In this study, tenant farmers appeared to be more constrained than those which owned their own farms, mainly due to the level of control and power landlords had over the direction and strategies of the farm enterprise. The role of power and domination in tenant-landlord relationships is explored in-depth in the next chapter in relation to the iron cage metaphor (Section 8.2).

### 7.3 Upland Business characteristics

The business characteristics of a farm may act as facilitators and constraints to the farm enterprise. Farm size was found to be important and entrepreneurial practices were found to exist in both large and small sized farms, but smaller scale farms were

found to offer impressive amounts of economic, social, cultural and environmental contributions to both rural and urban economies. Topography and location were found to be essential in enabling farmers to diversify into direct selling activities, such as farm shop meat boxes. Finally, the type of livestock production system directly impacted farm profitability, with some farmers choosing to run more commercial livestock enterprises, with other farmers diversifying their livestock type or switching to sheep only production systems to increase profitability.

### 7.3.1 Farm size

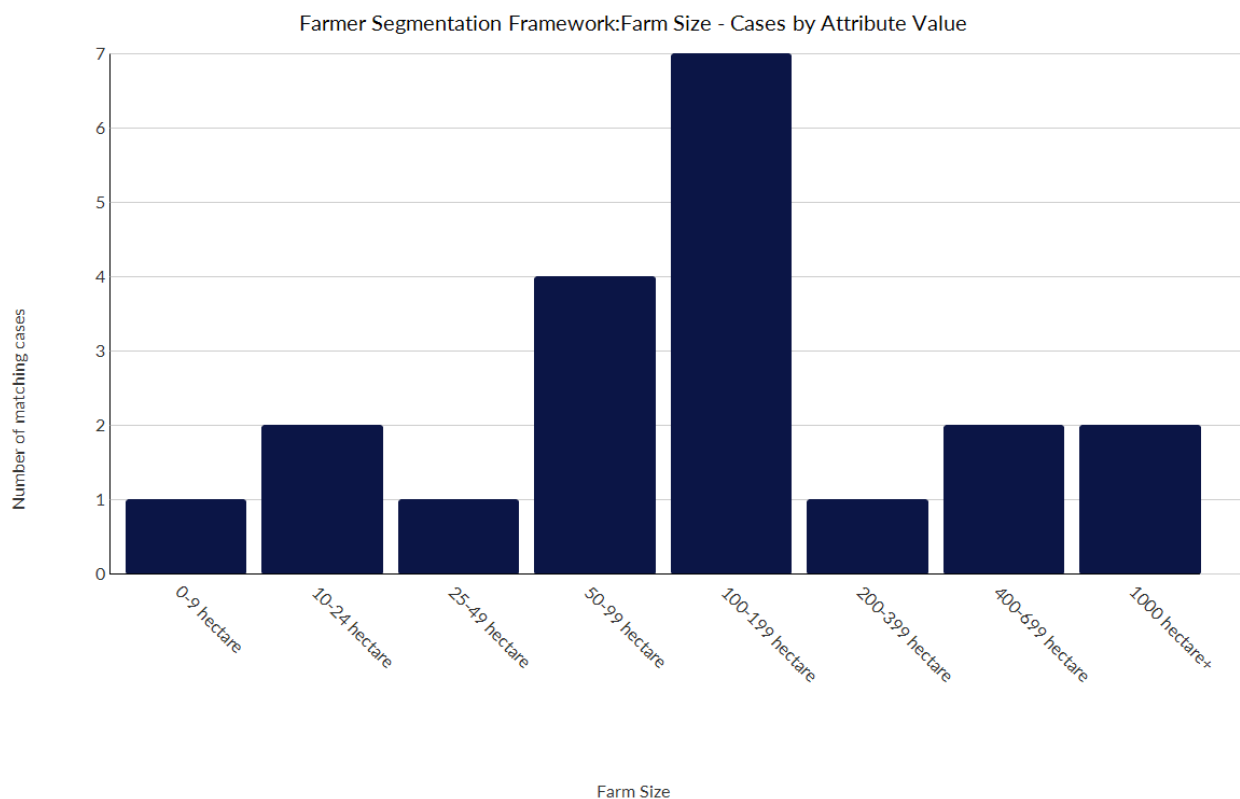


Figure 7.3.1 Farm size

As indicated in chapter two, across the EU the average number of farms are declining by around 400,000 per year (Matthews, 2019). However, on average hill farms are getting bigger by around 20%, with less farm labour required. Farm size is of great significance for farmers for several reasons. First, BPS is linked to land size, with

farmers being paid larger subsidies for managing larger parcels of land. Second, arguably those farmers with more access to land have more opportunities to generate income, for example adding more parcels of land to agri-environmental schemes, increasing livestock numbers, renting fields to neighbours, improving farm infrastructure and engaging in diversification (McElwee and Bosworth, 2011). Finally, those farmers who own larger farms can typically realise economies of scale, running larger livestock numbers seeking to maximize resources efficiently.

Margaret owned the largest farm in the sample, at over 5000 hectares, which can be compared with the smallest farm which is less than 10 hectares. However, it would be wrong to assume that those bigger scale farms are the most productive; although Margaret's farm is the largest in size, it is run by her alone. Conversely, those farmers who ran smaller farms focused more on diversification outlets and appeared to possess entrepreneurial skillsets (Pyysiäinen et al., 2006) and strategic thinking capabilities (Heracleous, 1998) which added value across different spatial contexts.

McElwee and Smith (2013) suggest growth by land acquisition is a common strategy for farmers to pursue. The findings in this research show that smaller farmers tended to be more entrepreneurially orientated (Lumpkin and Dess, 1996). However, many smaller scaled farmers were constrained by their access to land and could not maximize their farm business income through running large livestock numbers or drawing large subsidy payments. These farmers tended to turn towards diversified farm activities which required little land space to run a profitable farming business, such as opening farm shops, conducting farm walks and tours and direct selling. Those farmers who ran larger farms tended to be more traditional in nature, relying heavily on farm subsidy payments and having a typically higher stocking density of livestock. Smaller scale farmers typically employed 'entrepreneurial bricolage' Garud and Karnøe, 2003), whereby despite them operating in a resource-constrained environment (i.e., lack of access to land and finances), farmers sought alternative



revenue streams. The theoretical concept of bricolage is discussed further in the next chapter. Interestingly, all of the growth strategies mentioned by the farmers interviewed tended to be focused on access to land, with no farmers within the study seeking to downsize their farm. This reflects the fact that land is a scarce resource to farmers and plays a fundamental role in facilitating business growth (Alsos et al., 2003).

The English uplands is made up of farms of all sizes, with some smaller scale farmers displaying incredible amounts of entrepreneurial activity. Whilst it is evident that a trend is sweeping across Europe, with larger farms rising in popularity and more farmers trying to gain access to land to help increase farm competitiveness, the role of small family farms and the impact they have to both the financial and social economy should not be ignored. Later in the chapter, discussions around farm size are returned to, discussing the notion of the decline of the small family hill farm (Section 8.2.4). While farm size clearly relates to the nature of business strategies used, other features such as geographical location and topographical make-up also influenced farm entrepreneurship and strategy approaches.

### 7.3.2 Topography and location

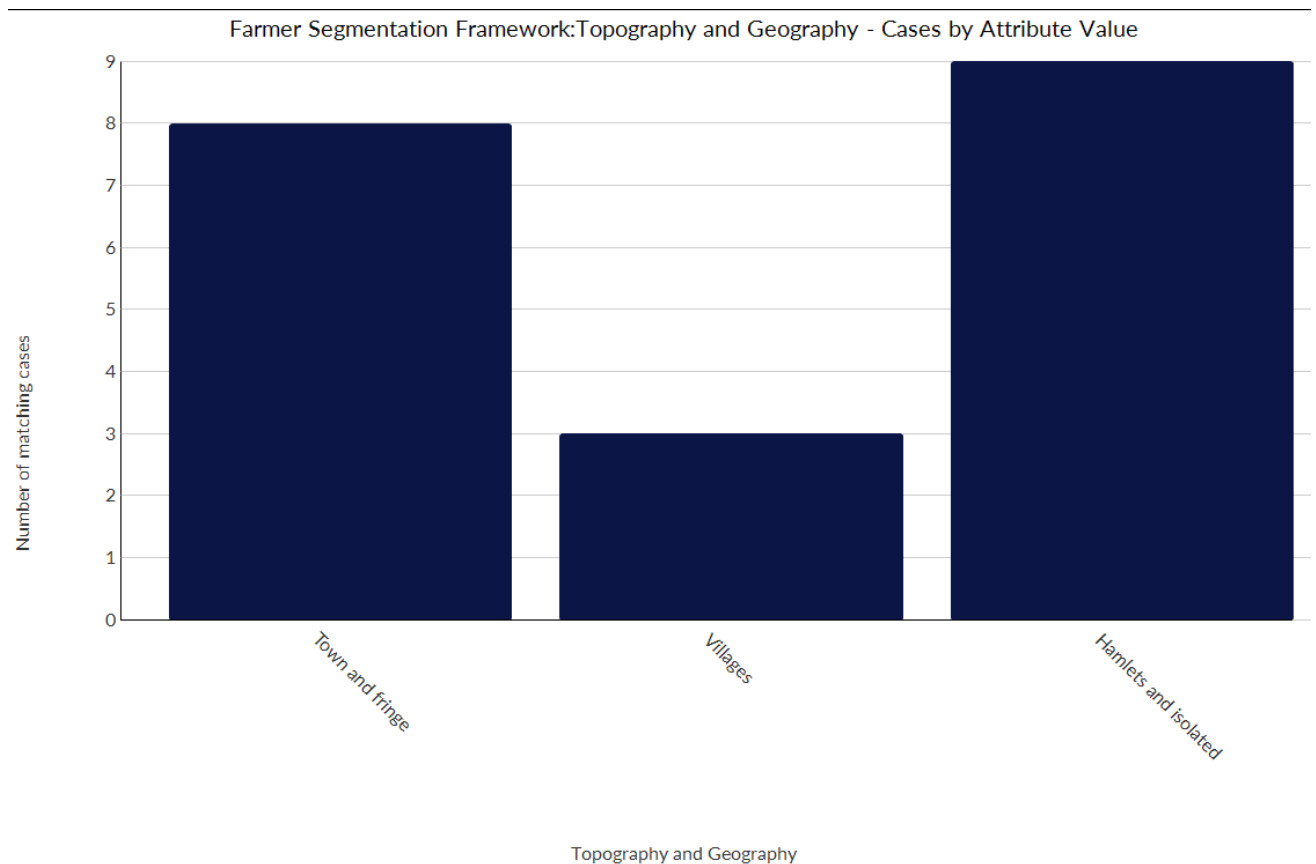


Figure 7.3.2 location of farms

“It’s all about location, location, location.”

The above quote from Gordon summarises how the location was found to be critical to the success of upland farming businesses. However, the location of farming businesses also had deeper symbolic meanings for many farmers. Sarah explains why she farms in Exmoor:

“Because I grew up here. And my husband says where else on earth would you want to be. He came from Essex. I just love Exmoor. It’s got everything. It’s got beautiful beaches, you’ve got the moorlands, the woodlands”

It appears then that some farmers choose the location of their farming businesses not based upon the resources in that local area, but because of the symbolic and emotional attachments in regard to space and place (Low, 1992). Farmar-Bowers (2010) highlights that the farming family are tied to strategic decision-making, however, the quote above highlights both the material dimensions, such as favourable geographical properties (i.e., land rich in natural capital (Spake et al., 2019) and subjective elements (i.e., a place where they grew up and are known within the local rural community) which can influence the strategic decisions of farmers. However, these subjective place attachments may be counterproductive to the economic sustainability of the farming enterprise. Deciding where to farm is an important strategic decision, making choices in regard to living close to family over farming in an area which has good access to essential [rural] resources may constrain effective farm entrepreneurship. Roger provides insight into the challenges surrounding the location of his farming business:

“It’s hard being entrepreneurial where I live. I mean I’m 12 miles from the nearest shop or pub or anything like that. If I farmed on the outskirts of a city area, I think I would be extremely entrepreneurial. When you live halfway up a mountain it’s a bit more bloody difficult.” (See Appendix 2 for transcript)

Equally, location was seen to be a significant strength to many farming businesses. Some farmers had access to both rural and urban resources spanning across different ‘spatial contexts’ (Müller and Korsgaard, 2018), they were able to use these place-based resources to their advantage. Some farmers were able to make use of the local rural labour force in running their farm business, build connections and generate social capital (Bourdieu, 1986) with other rural businesses such as abattoir owners, and engage with customers living in both rural and urban areas. Farmer Claire notes how a good working relationship with a local abattoir owner enabled her to engage in direct selling, setting up a farm shop meat box scheme. Interestingly, Claire had a

poor working relationship with the last owner of the abattoir, which constrained her entrepreneurial ambitions. Claire states:

“We use the local abattoir for that [direct selling], which is only about 12 miles away, so that’s really useful to us. They have very high animal welfare standards so that’s great... We started with just a few and when the abattoir changed hands we got up and running. It really is a key part of our business now. We are really pleased with the meat box scheme.”

It is evident that running a successful farming enterprise is dependent upon the resources available to farmers. Local abattoirs play a crucial role in supporting farmers in their diversified activities, as skillsets beyond commercial farming practices are required. However, suppose farmers do not have good working relationships with the abattoir owners nearby, or even access to an abattoir. In that case, this can constrain the ways in which farmers can diversify their farm businesses. Yet, local abattoirs are in decline. In the 1930s, there were around 30,000 small abattoirs in the UK, today there are just under 250 (Ryan, 2018). For farmers to run successful and profitable farming businesses, rural infrastructure is an absolute necessity. Abattoirs are not the only supporting businesses many upland farmers need locally to succeed: livestock auction markets, animal feed stores and machinery repair specialists are also required to help farmers run economically sustainable enterprises. The implications here then to help support upland farmers, would be to help support other businesses connected to the farm businesses, supporting the wider rural economies outside of the farming business.

Topographic makeup is also important in running a successful farm. The nature of the land matters: for example, marginal land is of little use to farmers who want to breed hundreds of heads of livestock. Yet, those farmers who have marginal land can often receive grants under agri-environmental schemes. Farmers who are rich in natural

capital (Spake et al., 2019) and know the types of environmental services they can produce through their farm, could be better off financially speaking under the ELMs. As subsidies are phased out during the next seven years, many farmers are uncertain about the environmental services they can produce and how they will be paid under the ELMs. An executive from a leading agricultural charity commented on the uncertainty surrounding the implementation of ELMs:

“Nothing is in place yet, and there is a lot of uncertainty about how to reward farmers. At the moment they are playing with the idea of self-assessment, but this will be a nightmare in our eyes, as few farmers actually understand their environmental scheme claims. We are also concerned about how the ELMs funding will be distributed amongst farmers and other environmental groups, alongside if it will receive proper scrutiny in parliament. It is all uncertain.”

Those farmers who understand the environmental output of their farm could arguably be in a greater position than those farmers who don't. A question is raised in the literature, which asks if farmers are businesspeople (Couzy and Dockes, 2008). Another question should be asked, how much do farmers know about environmental farming? This point around farming and the environment is discussed later in the chapter (Section 7.5.4).

This sub-section has shown how the location and topographic makeup of upland farms may act as facilitators or constraints to farm businesses. The location of upland farms is not always rational based upon running a profitable farming enterprise. Other symbolic meanings were discovered (Blumer, 1969), such as place attachment (Low, 1992). Access to rural and urban resources were also found to be important, including how a thriving rural economy allowed farmers to run more financially viable businesses and give them more opportunities to pursue entrepreneurial strategies. However, topography and geographic location is not the only factor which

influences the farm business, the type of livestock system provides further insight into the identity of the farming enterprise.

7.3.3 Livestock system

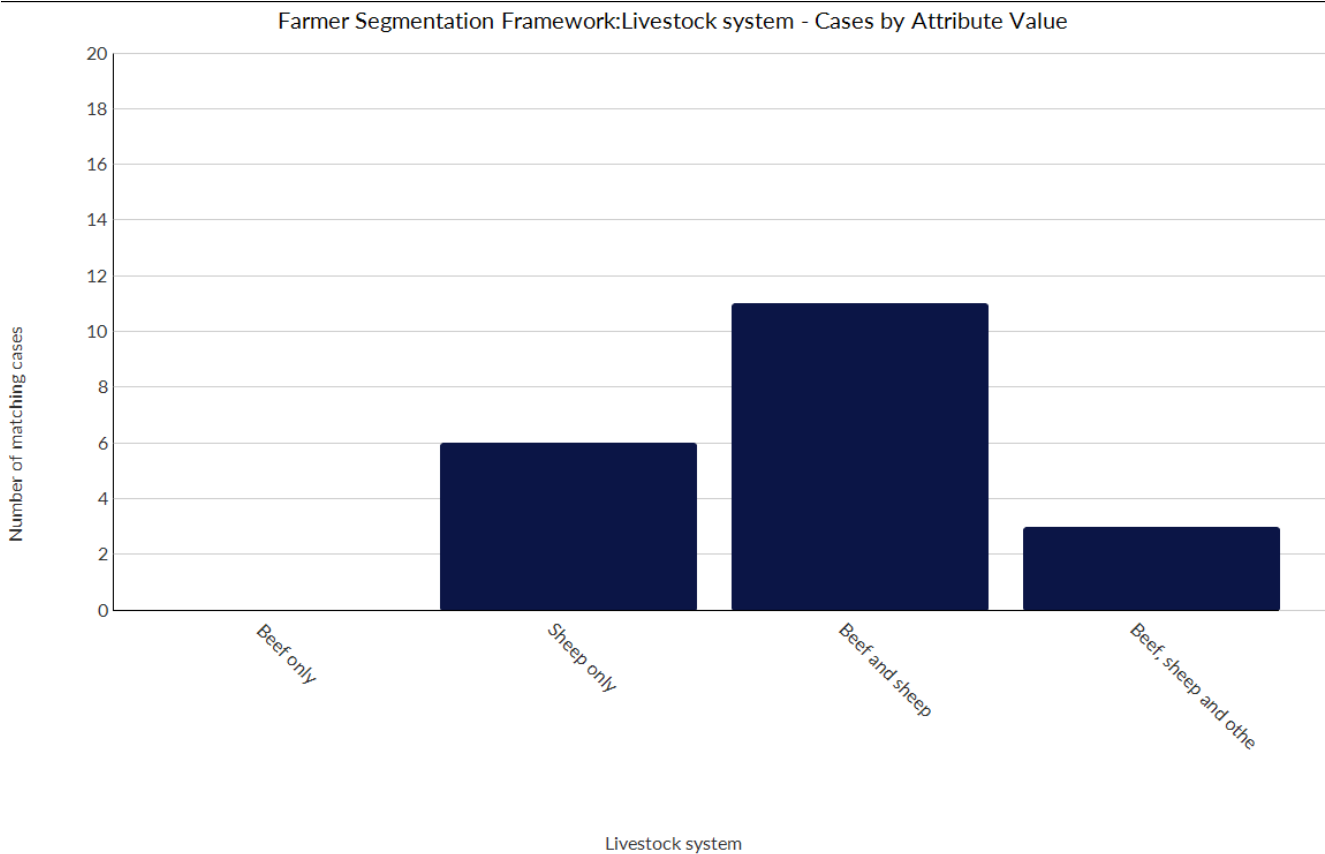


Figure 7.3.3 types of livestock systems

The livestock system is an important characteristic of an upland farm. Eleven farmers reared both cattle and sheep, six ran sheep only production systems, whilst three farmers kept other forms of livestock, such as equestrian, pigs, and goats in addition to rearing beef and sheep.

The type of livestock system appeared central to each farm’s identity. Lokier et al. (2021) argue that some farmers are reluctant to diversify farm businesses away from core activities, which was the case with many farmers interviewed. In several cases, particularly amongst male farmers, it appeared that the only reason for farm

diversification was to generate financial sustainability. In other words, some were pushed, as opposed to pulled, into pursuing diversification strategies (De Rosa et al., 2019). Nick comments on some of the uncertainties he has around [push] farm diversification:

“My wife has got a few ideas for diversification but I dunno, it’s a difficult one [unsure tone going up and down], it’s kind of like I feel like we should stick to what we know... I like to think we’re fairly good at what we have done in terms of beef and sheep. I’ve worked on places which have diversified a lot and overwhelmingly the focus has come off the core business. I mean it’s understandable during the set up, but it seems to me that it’s the core business which seems to suffer the most.”

Nick is reluctant to diversify his farm business because he does not want to shift focus away from the core commercial activities on his farm. His business attention is orientated to growing and running and financially stable cattle and sheep enterprise, for him diversification will not allow him to achieve his growth strategy. Nick identifies as a beef and sheep farmer and does not want to alter this farming identity (Vesala et al., 2007). This finding here is in line with the work of Lokier et al. (2021) and compliments Fitz-Koch’s et al. (2017) work around entrepreneurial identity, showing that entrepreneurial activities, such as some forms of diversification, may alter the farming identities some farmers are trying to construct. Indeed, this suggests that some farmers can be constrained by their identities. More traditionalist farmers do not want to pursue entrepreneurial strategies, such as farm shop diversification, because it might challenge existing and core farm activities.

Whilst beef and sheep farming is the most common livestock system in upland farming, some farmers had pursued sheep only livestock systems to respond the profitability issues, Josh states:

“ [hesitant] I’ve never really enjoyed working with beef cattle. I was advised by several people in the early days when I was looking into beef production about the best system I should opt for to make a profit. My advisor said to me ‘I cannot give you a production system for beef cattle in the uplands that will guarantee you a profit’. I’ve always kept a careful eye on the numbers in my business, beef cattle does not look like a sound investment”

Profitability in beef farming is clearly a challenge that prompted other farmers to turn to other livestock types. Those farmers who had diversified into running farm tours bred different types of livestock, such as specialist breeds of sheep and cattle, Exmoor ponies, goats and pigs etc. However, Margaret commented on how those more entrepreneurially orientated farmers are spoiling the rural atmosphere and challenging traditional farmer identities:

“Just a minute what do you mean by being more entrepreneurial? Do you mean like the fella next to me who has Limousine and Charolais pedigree cattle in sheds in the hills, which is nonsense. They run it all with huge costs and fancy machinery. Is that entrepreneurial? Spending the money that you get from your basic payments to keep animals which don’t pay anything.”





Photo 5 Manx Loaghtan (Author Generated)

Indeed, some farmers had flocks of rare breed sheep, like the Manx Loaghtan breed pictured above. These rare breed sheep are different to commercial breeds seen on other farms (i.e., Swaledale, Texel, Suffolk). They are also quirky in nature and provide an opportunity for members of the public at agricultural shows to learn about native breeds and farming in general. Moreover, farmers who have rare breeds and engage in direct selling can sell premium products, engaging in direct selling and promoting eating rare breed meat, allowing farmers to differentiate their homogeneous products from other farmers (Porter, 1980). For example, the Valais Blacknose sheep is a rare breed sheep that can sell for over £10,000 per head, compared to conventional farmers who sell their sheep for between £50 and £80. However, farming these unconventional breeds is a niche area and may alter how a farmer is perceived in the community. In

order to engage in effective direct selling, farmers require skillsets not present in commercial farming (McElwee and Bosworth, 2011; Lokier et al., 2021).

This section has shown how the type of livestock kept on farm connects with a farmer's [entrepreneurial] identity. While most traditionally orientated farmers commercially rear cattle and sheep, those more business-orientated farmers appear to be switching to sheep only livestock systems given the poor profitability in the beef market, whilst other farmers have moved away from traditional livestock breeds and begun rearing rare breeds. Those farmers who have diversified into the tourism-related industries, such as glamping and farm shops, were particular prone to keeping rare breeds on their farms. It is evident from these findings that both the personal and farm characteristics influence farmer approaches to entrepreneurship and strategy. The following subsections probe deeper into the FSF, providing insight into the different business activities and processes undertaken by farmers.

#### 7.4 Business Activities and Processes

In this sub-section, the business activities and processes connecting to the farming enterprises are discussed. These sections show that the more entrepreneurially orientated farmers seek to generate social capital through utilising connections outside of conventional family and friend networks (Bourdieu and Richardson, 1986). Successful business-orientated farmers and farm entrepreneurs utilise innovative thinking, alongside leverage technology to help meet the objectives of the farming enterprise. Finally, some farmers demonstrate a high level of strategic and adaptive thinking (Liedtka, 1998) allowing them to future proof their farm businesses from certain constraints and adapt accordingly to changes in the marketplace via entrepreneurial means.

### 7.4.1 Support Networks

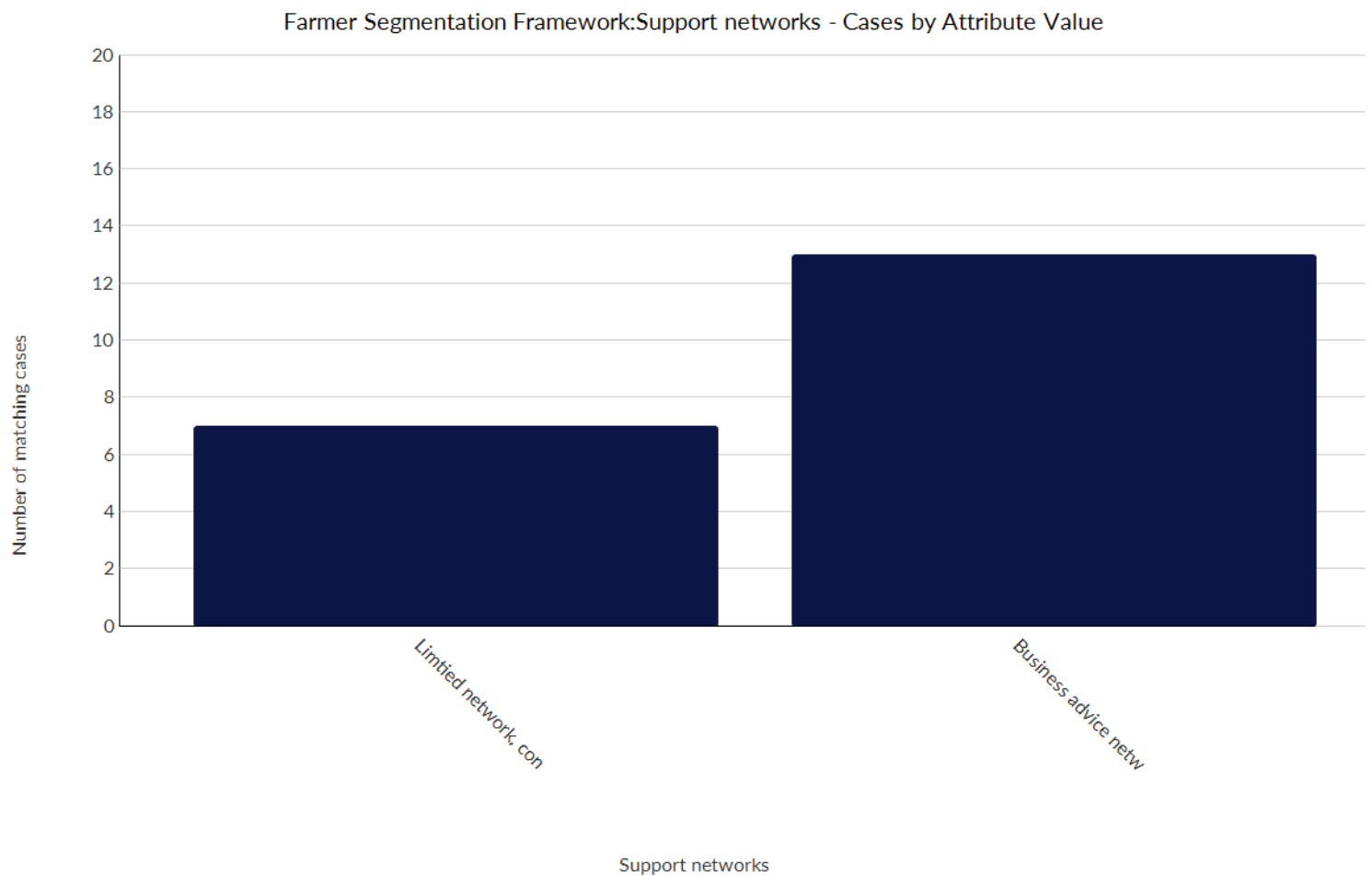


Figure 7.4.1 Support Networks

Those more entrepreneurially orientated farmers depended a great deal more on support networks, seeking to build social capital to help them overcome farm constraints (Bourdieu, 1986). Entrepreneurially orientated farmers tended to network differently compared to the more traditionalist style farmers, being more involved in seeking information from business advice networks instead of using family and friend networks, which is in line with prior research (McElwee and Bosworth, 2011). Typically, the older farmers were more resistant to seeking information beyond that of their friends and family. Mikes says:

“It’s a lonely business farming. You think other farmers and members of the public are your friends but they’re not. They’ll only do something for you if you do something for them. It’s the same with the public, if one of them falls over walking down the road on your farm track, you will soon have a lawyers letter asking for compensation.”

The above quote implies a somewhat ‘us versus them’ mentality between farmers and those outside of the agricultural sector, which resembles the rural-urban divide phenomena mentioned in the literature (Tacoli, 1998; Rizov and Walsh, 2011). This was interesting as some farmers appeared to orientate their business towards the general public by bringing their farm products to urban areas. Whilst other farm businesses were largely closed off to wider audiences.

However, the role of family and friend networks used by traditionalist farmers should not be disregarded as they can play a fundamental role in the economic sustainability of farming enterprises. Many farmers utilised family labour to minimise costs (Jervell, 2011). Often, the farm wife looked after the financial accounting, the farm children handled administrative duties, and some farmers shared farm equipment with neighbours, allowing them to decrease operating costs. For example, one farmer interviewed lived opposite a poultry factory and had an arrangement each year where he would clear out the factory of chicken manure with his machinery for free, the farmer could apply this to his field to improve grass quality. Without establishing this relationship with his neighbour, this farmer would have missed out on a scarce resource to his farming business.

Networking was found to be prominent amongst the younger farmers (Lévesque and Minniti, 2011), who were typically more entrepreneurially orientated and sought out support from those outside of their personal family and friends’ networks. Sarah states:

“I think that’s what I love about farming...

The support networks that Tom speaks of is incredible, it’s really lovely that if you’ve had a bad week everybody always makes you feel better by sharing their bad week [laughs] It’s a really important thing for supporting the mental health of farmers.”

Support networks appeared to be a way for younger farmers to overcome the constraints and challenges facing them and their businesses. Support networks were popular due to the rurally isolated nature of farming and the separate challenges associated with being a young farmer. However, it was only in the Exmoor sample where the value of support networks were raised. Other than professional memberships such as the NFU, there did appear to be a lack of hill farming support networks.

Support networks were both a facilitator and constraint to farm entrepreneurship and clearly plays a role in allowing farmers to pursue certain business strategies. It was found that entrepreneurially orientated farmers typically acquired social capital through different types of support networks. Young farmers in particular saw value in regional farming support groups, where they could share the concerns and work to overcome the constraints facing them and their businesses. This section has provided insight into how upland farmers network, adding to the existing literature on generating social capital in rural communities (Sharp, 2003; Fisher, 2013; Arnott et al., 2021). While networking provided insight into the entrepreneurial nature of some farmers, other activities such as attitudes towards technology and innovation provided insight into the entrepreneurial and strategic practices of upland farmers.



#### 7.4.2 Farm Technology and Innovation

“You can’t have too much technology on a hill farm”



Photo 6 Autonomous Machinery (Author Generated)

In the quote above, Gordon summarises the general view many farmers have regarding technology adoption on upland livestock farms. This view is noted in the rural studies literature, whereby Bowen et al. (2019) argue that the digital revolution appears to be bypassing the UK’s agricultural sector. In comparison, with other industries many would agree with this statement. Industry 4.0 technologies underpinned by big data, machine learning and artificial intelligence are changing



society and the ways entrepreneurs do business even in the agricultural sector, albeit at a slower adoption rate. Photo 6 above shows an autonomous machine that allows farmers to reduce the manual labour required on farms and improve the financial performance of the farm enterprise. Within the dairy sector especially, high levels of automation are common practice, with automated dairy parlours challenging conventional milking practices (Holloway et al., 2014). Photo 7 below shows a dairy cow eating from an automated feeding lot, which provides a tailored amount of food based on the cow's weight. However, technology adoption on upland farms, in general, did appear to be limited.



Photo 7 (Author Generated) Automated Feeding

Some farmers possessed proficient skillsets in using software and farm technology, such as implementing farm management software to keep records on stock (i.e.

Shearwell, QuickBooks) and using hardware such as using livestock ear tagging wands and backfat scanners. Older farmers typically used written record keeping, visual methods in monitoring livestock, such as marking them with paint or tying string around an animal's neck, and often outsourced important managerial tasks, like subsidy applications, to family members or land agents who used technology and software.

Two farmers in the study were currently undertaking a project on improving farm efficiencies through weighing and monitoring lamb growth. They collected and inputted data via a written diary, which was then transferred to a computer software package that allowed the farmers to track various metrics on the animals. Recording data on feeding intakes, backfat scanning, weights and diseases provided the farmers with data to make informed livestock management decisions:

“It's really easy to use, all you do is log it on the hand scanner and you have access to its records all of its life, any injections its hard, calves, weight, diseases. We are not stabbing in the dark with our stock.”

The two farmers undertaking this project displayed high levels of operations management skillsets. Within other industries most supply chains are optimized to be as efficient as possible, with managers understanding there is a time, cost and value to every process, ‘getting what you measure’ (Kaye and Anderson, 1999). Older farmers typically measured very little, only having a rough idea of their business costs which their accountants often summarised. When taking into consideration subsidies received and the uncertain prices farmers get for their livestock, it is often very difficult for farmers to keep control of their business costs. Some older farmers did not know how much profit they made in the last year. In contrast, the younger farmers often noted a need to monitor farm business costs, most likely because they had to be



more cost-conscious because they are newer entrants into the sector and are not recipients of large subsidy payments.

As I deepened into my PhD studies, I realised that I am interested in technology and entrepreneurship within farming contexts. This interest led to several published works. I found traditional farmers often possess the capabilities to use farming software and technology, but the contingent factors (i.e., age, location, skillsets etc.) limits successful adoption (Gittins et al., 2020). Moreover, I found that technology enables people from non-farming backgrounds, particularly women, to enter the sector through modern farming practices, such as through urban and vertical farming initiatives (Gittins and Morland, 2021). However, the findings from my previous work are around the adoption of technologies (ICT) and do not explore how entrepreneurial farmers engage in farm innovation beyond hardware.

Innovation and technology are two separate things, and farmers can be innovative without leveraging technology. One farmer I had a conversation with at an agricultural show in 2019 told me about his diversified farm enterprise. He breeds, fattens and slaughters Italian water buffalo and sells them through his direct selling business. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, his revenue streams were impacted, whereby he regularly sells a large proportion of his 'buffalo burgers' at agricultural shows. As these social events were cancelled, he was innovative in his response. He adapted to these changing times by running a drive-thru steak pie venture on his farm. The farm entrepreneur here utilised space on his farm in an innovative way, building a drive-thru operation to continue his direct sales (Photo 8 below).



Photo 8 Drive-thru steak pie (<https://www.thebuffalofarm.co.uk/>)

The findings from this section complement existing farm entrepreneurship research that has sought to explore innovation and technology adoption on upland farms (Morris et al., 2017; Gittins et al., 2020). As the farming sector has an ageing workforce, it is unsurprising that there is a general lack of farm technology adoption. Still, such innovative thinking has gained significant momentum as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Many successful farm entrepreneurs do leverage technology and software to help them meet their business aims and objectives. However, as technology adoption is limited by contingent conditions (age, skillsets, rural infrastructure), other farmers have been utilising farm innovation as means of pursuing business strategies. In some cases, adopting technologies and software allowed farmers to make farm management decisions based on data and significantly helped them reduce operating costs. While the adoption of technology in the upland farm sector is significantly lagging behind other agricultural sectors and, indeed, non-agricultural sectors. Successful entrepreneurial farmers typically utilise higher amounts of technology and innovation than more traditionalist type farmers, technology is seen as a means of overcoming farm constraints and may play a fundamental role in helping farmers think strategically about their businesses.

#### 7.4.3 Strategic thinking

Strategic thinking is a broad term which encompasses multiple aspects of strategic management, from the conceptualisation of long-term plans to the planning and control of enterprise resources (Heracleous, 1998b). When asking farmers about strategy and the long-term goals of the farming enterprise, I received varied responses. Angela, a senior member of an agricultural trade body, discussed farm business strategies, stating:

“You will always get the 5% of them which are really innovative and really switched on and then you have the bottom end, I don’t know 20% that just don’t change and are doing it as they have always been doing it. Then there are those in the middle, which are the ones which you can target with ways to improve your business... without a good strategy and a business plan then your farm business isn’t going to be viable.”

This quote from Angela here resonates with the work McElwee and Annibal (2009) who categorised farmers into 'ABCD' rankings, suggesting category 'A' and 'D' farmers do not need targeting by rural advisory groups, as the successful one's do not need to improve, with the category 'D' one's not wanting to take advice. However, those farmers who want to improve but are struggling can be targeted by certain groups.

When discussing strategy formulation within farming businesses, only a few farmers regarded themselves as having formal business strategies, goals and objectives. Typically, these tended to be the more entrepreneurially orientated farmers who were required to have a business plan in order to fulfil a loan or mortgage agreement from the bank. Another agricultural stakeholder interviewed, Hank shared some insight on this:

"It is quite difficult to plan your business strategy when you don't know the value of your animal... you simply don't know, until the week before you sell them, or sometimes on the day."

Both Wolf et al. (2007) and Stanford-Billington and Cannon (2010) found a lack of strategic planning implemented in farming businesses. However, many of the farmers who regarded themselves as being quite entrepreneurial in nature, demonstrated strong strategic thinking capabilities. Vik and McElwee (2011) noted this finding here, who regard strategic thinking as a key characteristic of entrepreneurial farmers. I asked Sarah from Exmoor about her long-term goals for the farm and she said:

"We have a written down business plan with cash flow forecasts, and everything is sort of costed up before we start anything. We can't obviously cost for disease or anything, but it helps us establish a sense of direction."

However, many of the older farmers did not appear to give much thought to the future strategic direction of the farming enterprise, beyond succession planning for the farm. It may be argued that as agricultural policy change happens, many farmers will be rethinking their business strategies around the types of environmental services they can produce on their farms. This point around strategic thinking capabilities and farm entrepreneurship is developed further in the conclusions chapter (Section 9.2), discussing the notion of ‘farmers as strategic entrepreneurs.’

#### 7.4.4 Segmentation Summary

Discussing the empirical data in relation to the upland farmer segmentation framework has highlighted the heterogenic nature around the practices and identities of farmers and their businesses. It has also begun to show some of the challenges relating to personal characteristics and business characteristics, such as age of farm holder, educational background and location of the farm, to name a few. There are clearly stark differences and patterns between those more entrepreneurially orientated farmers and those more traditionalist in nature, though there are exceptions in certain cases. Next, I turn to draw together the above findings to examine upland farmers’ constraints and challenges that emerged through this research.

#### 7.5 Constraints and challenges facing English upland beef and sheep farmers

This section presents the main challenges and constraints facing English upland beef and sheep farmers identified through the thematic analysis, helping to answer RQ1. These challenges can be broken down into various categories and sub-categories which can be visualised in the figure 7.5 below. Five main themes of challenges emerged from the data analysis:

1. Personal Farm Constraints

2. Political and Economic Constraints
3. Social Constraints
4. Environmental Constraints
5. COVID-19 Constraints.

Each of these themes are now discussed in relation to the empirical data.



## CHALLENGES AND CONSTR...

### CHALLENGES AND CONSTRAINTS FACING FARMERS

#### SOCIAL

Rural-urban divide	Hill Farm Decline	Communication barriers		
Mental health	Rural crime	Farming Family	Food production	
	changes in food consumption	Loss of rural actors	Farm labo...	
			Walkers	

#### ENVIRONMENTAL

ELMS uncertainty		Livestock and the envir...	
Experiences of Agri-environmental schemes		Environment...	Conflicting ...
		Loss of labour due to ...	
Climate and weather			

#### PERSONAL FARM CHALLENGES

Sucession challenges	
Location	Resource const...
Landlord disputes	Disease

#### POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC

##### BREXIT CHALLENGES

##### PROFITABILITY

##### UNCERTAINTY

##### GOVERNMENT CHAL...

##### ACCESSIN...

##### SUPE...

#### COVID CHALLENGES

##### ECONOMIC

##### SOCIAL

### 7.5.1 Personal Constraints

Many personal constraints emerged through the interviews and conversations I had with farmers. While issues such as landlord relationships, disease outbreaks and access to resources were noted as constraints (Discussed further Section 8.2.1), the most prominent constraint relevant to farm strategies was farm succession planning. As most upland farm businesses comprise family partnerships, it is unsurprising that succession (i.e., who will succeed the family farm) was a key issue. Succession planning is now discussed.

Generally, there were those farmers who had clearly thought about farm succession, involving farm advisors and solicitors to devise a plan as to what happens to the farm's assets in the future, discussing which members of the farming family are left assets. Succession planning was controversial because in many cases, members who have no active involvement in the farm business would like to retain some of the farm's assets, which often leads to family disagreements. Many of the older farmers had no farm succession or wills in place and this was a cause for concern for some of the farmer's children. While older farmers appeared to be content in managing their farming business, many of the younger farmers interviewed felt frustrated about a lack of farm succession. Simon comments:

"I suppose it's the lack of talk between father and son, as to what the future direction of the business will be. I have a brother who is not in farming but obviously he must be considered. There's nothing happening at the discussion side. So, there's a lot of big questions and sort of the overall goal of where is the farm going, are somewhat up in the air really... I'm trying to persuade my dad to set out a 5 year or a 10-year plan and possibly even his retirement plan, but he's very reluctant to retire and very reluctant to slow down... We just need to



know what he wants. If he told me that's what he wanted in the beginning, I might not have come home to the farm if you see what I mean."

Farm succession is complex because a farm is more than a business. Members of the farming family often live on working farms, yet have no active role in the farm business. Often just one member of the farm family will take over the farm, with other members of the farming family allocated money instead. Whilst farm succession can be frustrating, dividing up farms and selling off assets can weaken the economic positioning of the farming enterprise, and if members of the farming family are left negligible amounts of money and another inherits the farm, disagreements can occur.

However, there is a lot of unseen work that goes on behind the scenes in regard to farm succession. Whilst one member of the farming family might receive the farm and its assets, other members might have received higher wages through seeking off farm employment. Primary farm decision-makers must handle these family conflicts. Some farmers, though, did have open succession plans with their children. Josh states:

"Yes I do [talk about succession]. That is something which I have gained from my father, I was 32 years old before I went into farming. I had the view of college being a complete waste of time, if these guys [lecturers] were any good at doing what they talked about they be doing it instead of talking about it. And this view is not that unusual I'm afraid for farmers of that generation... I am already fully engaged on the conversation about succession. The kids both know about the ups and the pitfalls of coming into the hills."

Having clear succession strategies is useful for planning for the long-term goals of the farming enterprise and helps mediate family conflicts, a key challenge noted by many farmers within this research. However, it was also found that farm succession can be detrimental to entrepreneurial thinking. Some farmers miss out on outsider

experiences, such as going to agricultural college (Section 7.2.3), due to succeeding the farm. Jacob notes how both good and bad skillsets are often passed down through the farm succession process, with many farmers picking up the bad traits of their traditionalist parents (See Appendix 2 for transcript).

Reflecting upon my insider positionality here, discussions around farm succession in my family are often avoided, as they only cause tensions between myself and my brothers. The reflection below highlights the delicate issue of succession planning. Certainly, in my family a lack of discussions has led me to not wanting to pursue a career as a full-time farmer. On August 16<sup>th</sup> 2020, I noted a log in my research diary:

“My dad is never clear on how the farm will be transferred. The farm women, my fiancé and my sister in laws are always eager to know what is happening and try to start these conversations. My two older brothers have zero interest in running the farm yet want a share of the farm’s assets. Whilst I have pursued a career away from the farm, I am still actively involved in the farm’s activities and may transition to a part-time farming role later in life. My younger brother is the most connected to the farm, but there are concerns over his character and ability to learn new skills. I see the tensions from multiple perspectives and just think why we don’t all just sit down and discuss this, but I know this won’t happen.”

Personal Reflection

Succession in farming businesses is a complicated matter, whilst the government has drafted plans for [older] farmers to leave the sector (DEFRA, 2021) - a potential way to boost entrepreneurial activity in farming businesses - issues around succession planning may prevent many farmers from exiting as many farmers may not want to leave their children without a farming business if they are interested in succeeding the

family farm. Nonetheless, it may persuade more farmers to have discussions around farm succession planning at least. Indeed, those more entrepreneurially orientated farmers interviewed who possessed strategic thinking capabilities and had formal business plans, tended to also have succession plans. Having succession plans often helped farmers communicate the strategic direction of the farming enterprise to members of the farming family, allowing them to make better informed career choices and have open discussions with their parents about succeeding the farm. Yet, some [traditionalist] farmers who didn't have succession plans often created a rather uncertain environment for the farm business, with the farm children unsure about the future of (and their role) in the family farm business. Indeed, succeeding the farm arguably is an economic gamble with many, like me, turning to careers outside of agriculture because of the increasing economic challenges.

#### 7.5.2 Political and Economic Constraints

Many of the challenges facing farmers related to the economic performance of the farming enterprise. The impact of the removal of BPS and the increasing difficulty of achieving profitability in farming enterprises were the two biggest economic constraints facing farmers. These constraints are now discussed.

Much of the previous farm entrepreneurship and rural studies research that discusses subsidies' role was carried out before the transition away from the EU's CAP (Donnellan et al., 2009; Rizov et al., 2013). There is a limited, but growing body of research, concerned with understanding and hypothesising how farmers will react to the expected changes of a UK DAP (Swinbank, 2016; Hubbard et al., 2018; Arnott et al., 2019). However, much of this research consists of review articles and secondary data collection, with a lack of empirical studies exploring the present realities of hill farmers during this policy change. The following sections discuss the impact of BPS removal amongst upland farmers.

Josh said something about subsidy support which echoed throughout the interview data:

“I am quite happy to put my hand on my heart and say the single farm payment has allowed me to stay profitable for these last 15 years. Now, if that was gone overnight, I’m not sure how long I could keep afloat.”

It is clear then that many farmers are concerned over the UK government’s decision to phase out BPS over the next seven years. Farmers have been subsidised through direct payments since 2005, it would be fair to say that many farmers have become economically reliant upon them, with it being difficult for many to stay profitable without them. However, many of the tenant farmers interviewed shared their concerns that subsidy support mechanisms have only favoured those large-scale farmers who own their farms outright, not tenant farmers. Many smaller sized farmers questioned the need for subsidy support all together, Roger states:

“I’m not a big fan of support. I think support can be used to prop up businesses which are failing. That’s probably what a lot of support has been or is being used for.”

Farmers like Roger argued that subsidy support has done more damage than good, arguing that it has only supported the economically unviable farm businesses, which shouldn’t exist anyway. I asked Roger if he thought he could survive without subsidy support payments, he replied:

“I think I could survive a year or two, but it’s so difficult to know because I sell a lot of heifers for breeding, would that man be there to buy them? I sell store cattle; would that finisher still be there to buy them? You’ve got feed

businesses, if there's less livestock farms then there will be no one buying the feed, then these businesses will go bust. There would be very high chances of me having to give up. The whole thing would change dramatically. Everything would be turned on its head."

This extract from Roger resonates with Resource Dependency Theory (RDP) (Hillman et al., 2009), suggesting that farmers are incredibly reliant upon local and further afield resources to sustain their farm activities. Whilst some farmers might be sustainable without BPS, the success of farming businesses is largely dependent on a range of supply chain actors. Farmers do not operate in isolation, they need access to people, for example store producers, finishing farms, animal feed stores, machinery garages *inter alia*. The removal of subsidies may therefore have consequences beyond its economic impact on farmers alone. This finding is discussed further in the final chapter when discussing policy recommendations (Section 9.3.3), suggesting policymakers should do more to support the rural economies to help the entire farm to fork supply chain, not just farming businesses.

Whilst many farmers are economically reliable on BPS, even those farmers who received generous entitlements argued that they do not *want* subsidy support, rather they *need* it due to the institutional conditions created by policymakers. Mike states:

"We don't want support really, if they aren't going to give us the subsidies, it's alright nobodies bothered. But they're (the public) going to have to pay more for their lamb, beef and milk, and if they're not going to pay more then farms are going to shut down and close"

Mike argues that the reason for subsidy support are to keep food prices low for the general public, arguing that when subsidies are removed, the general public should pay more for their beef and lamb products, allowing them to farm without subsidies.

Many farmers raised concerns about agricultural wages in relation to other industries, arguing that the public misunderstands why farmers need subsidies and do not realise the wage differences between farming and non-farming sectors, Nick states:

“The reality of it is, and here I’ll be completely honest with you, my wife is a General Practitioner and she can earn more doing two days a week than I can ever dream of [laughs].”

Achieving profitability was found to be a key challenge facing many farmers. Calculating profitability is difficult in farming business because of the volatile prices of livestock. Farmers do not know until the day of sale how much they will get for an animal, which varies from day to day and the location of the livestock auction. In comparison to other industries, business owners are able to source products and sell them for a set price and calculate profit margins. Farmers cannot do this, as prices are constantly changing. Hank, one of the agricultural stakeholders interviewed, comments on the profitability issues within beef and sheep supply chains:

“The returns back to the market are always fairly sketchy for both beef and lamb. The beef market for example, I guess we’ve had sustained periods of low prices right across Europe for beef, then there’s various different factors around for all of that. So that clearly impacts on farmers returns... We have very very low food prices. And a very consolidated red meat processing sector who, to some extent, are beholden to UK retail. And that makes the whole environment quite challenging in terms of economic returns.”

Indeed, there are many factors that influence the profits farmers can make through their business. However, some farmers have engaged in direct selling to mitigate against uncertain livestock auction prices, allowing them to become price givers, not price takers in commercial farming enterprises. While this helped them control the price of the products they sell, some farmers still found issues when trying to sell their specialised products to supermarkets. For example, Jacob approached a supermarket about selling his premium mutton in their stores, they agreed that if he could guarantee 300 carcasses each year, they would buy them off him. However, when Jacob asked if they would guarantee to buy 300 carcasses off him, the supermarket refused to commit. Jacob states:

“I had enough of them. It could have been a big opportunity, but it was a huge huge huge risk at my end. It could end up bankrupting me if it goes wrong.”

The implications here are that farmers are operate in a volatile marketplace where prices are uncertain. Farmers can mitigate against these challenges by diversifying so they can produce and market their own products for a more certain price, however, if they want to do this on a scalable amount beyond niche meat boxes, they must engage in discussions with supermarkets who ultimately hold more power and control than farmers.

Some farmers even turned to informal business strategies in a response to the increasing profitability constraints in the sector. Cash in hand working is common practice in farming communities, whether that be for a day's labour building up some dry-stone walls or lending some equipment to a nearby farmer, cash is exchanged and often undeclared. One farmer talked to me about additional income he brings in through dog breeding:

“We breed pups as well. That can be a good earner... A few years ago we were only getting between £200 and £300 for a pup but this year prices have gone up to about £750...My son had a litter last year, had nine and sold each pup for 2 and a half thousand each. There’s big money in it. And we have the space. It’s stupid to think that I can buy and feed a calf up for 18 months and get £900 for her and if I’m lucky make £100 and my son can sell some bulldogs to some yuppies from Manchester for 15k.”

The interview extract above highlights one example of how informal activities can play a role in financing farm businesses, extending Smith and McElwee’s (2013) work on illegal pluriactivity in farming communities. Given the marginal profitability of hill farms, such as in 2018 the average Farm Business Income per upland farm was around £15,500 per annum, income from informal activities could help farmers maintain financial security in their farming businesses. Perhaps the economic consequences caused by the COVID-19 pandemic also led to more farmers using more informal entrepreneurial business strategies to maintain profitability. Indeed, poor profitability in the farming sectors can be supplemented with informal activities.

Many farmers are facing increasing challenges relating to achieving farm profitability. The phasing out of BPS in accordance with a DAP is creating an uncertain environment for many farmers. Some farmers are turning to [informal] diversification strategies as a response to these increasing economic constraints. However, economic issues are not the only types of constraints facing upland farmers, social challenges are impacting many farmers. ‘Backyard ethnography’ as Smith et al. (2019) terms it has proved to be a useful methodological choice to explore informal farm business activities and strategies. Without my insider positionality, it would be difficult to gain access to data around the topic of informal entrepreneurship.



### 7.5.3 Social Constraints

Much of the farm entrepreneurship and rural studies literature is centred around the economic issues facing farmers, but ignores the social challenges they face (Franks, 2020). There were many social issues found when interviewing farmers, mainly centred around issues between rural and the urban environments (Tacoli, 1998), communication between farmers and other stakeholders, mental health, rural crime (Smith et al., 2017) and decline of small family hill farm. Some of these social constraints are now discussed.

Farmers might be considered a misunderstood social group, one commentor (anonymized) wrote this on social media when I posted a 'call for research participants' outlining some background to my study:

“Why on earth are we subsidising failing farms anyway? They’re not commercially viable a lot of these small family farms. Bet you £20 you don’t put that in your report”

It is understandable why many members of the general public do not know much about farming, other than what they see on TV or at agricultural shows. Indeed, farms are very much hidden, unless you personally know a farmer or go on a farm tour, it is quite difficult to understand what the day-to-day life of a farmer entails, making it easy to accept that a rural-urban divide does, indeed, exist (Tacoli, 1998).

Farming is socially constructed as an incredibly lonely and isolated role, and in some cases throughout the interviews, this was found to be true. One farmer notes how mental health challenges are prominent in upland farming, Gordon states:

“We have got to keep labour in these hills... If you look at the ELMs and the pro-environmental farming lobby groups, they’ll tell you that you don’t need to employ anybody to do the work. You don’t need to employ anyone to grow wildflowers.”

Some farmers like Gordon raised concerns over pressures to improve farm productivity, arguing that making efficiency gains will decrease the farm labour required, contributing further to the decline of small family farming businesses. Farmers suggested mental health to be a major social challenge in the industry. Indeed, a survey of 450 farmers under the age of 40 found that 88% viewed mental health as the biggest challenge facing farmers (Farm Safety Foundation, 2021). This questions the effectiveness of increasing farm productivity if it worsens the social constraints in the sector.



Photo 9 crumbled remains of a hill farm (author generated)

Photo 9 above shows the remains of a farmhouse in West Yorkshire. This is a common site across rural areas, as farmers have intensified their farm businesses over the years, the number of small family hill farms has been in decline. Mike shares his thoughts on the need for small family hill farms in a globalised world:

“They could bring it all in from abroad, the American’s have all the beef that we could ever want, New Zealand has all the lamb that we ever want, Denmark has all the bacon that we could ever want. To be really brutal, they don’t need 80,000 little farms in England, they just need the big cereal producers. Brexit could be one big opportunity to get rid of all the small farmers in one big swoop.”

It could be argued that many of these small-scale farms are unviable economically speaking. However, many small family farms offer immense social, cultural and environmental contributions. In the next chapter (Section 8.2), a theoretical discussion is presented through Nigel’s case study, discussing the increasing rationalisation of the modern farm, and the loss of traditional social actions. Indeed, many of the smaller scale farmers thought the government viewed them as insignificant in regard to upcoming policy change, which they viewed as an opportunity for smaller scaled farms to be replaced with bigger and more profitable farms. One elderly farmer from the Lake District regards herself as the last ‘proper farmer’ in her area, with farm prices rising so much so that only affluent individuals can buy them. Margaret explained:

“They’re all going as holiday cottages, getting tv stars buying them, and then people buy them, and the planning authority easily give them permission to

turn them into mansions. There's not a dwelling worth less than £1 million up here. We've not got any ordinary people left anymore."

Whilst there may be opportunities for those farmers who want to diversify into the tourism related sectors in the Lake District, such as opening campsites and holiday homes, those farmers who do not want to deviate from traditional beef and sheep production may feel more isolated. This presents issues around Entrepreneurial Identity (Vesala et al., 2007), traditionalist type farmers like Margaret feel agricultural land should be ran by more commercially focused farmers, rather than by those farmers whose activities differs to hers, for example those farmers pursuing tourism and diversification related strategies. It may be argued then those entrepreneurial identities and activities are changing the rural landscape, on the one hand it may be seen as bringing in additional tourism revenue to rural areas, but on the other it is conflicting with traditional farming practices.

Indeed, some studies have focused on some specific social challenges facing farmers, such as Smith et al. (2016) who discusses the role of dyslexia amongst farmers, suggesting that many farmers struggle with increasing bureaucracy and administrative duties due to learning conditions and educational backgrounds. Indeed, concerns were raised regarding communication barriers between farmers and those working in government roles, such as farmers dealing with the Rural Payments Agency. Many farmers felt that these actors did not understand the true extent of the realities facing farmers, arguing that many do not have any practical working experience of farming roles. This led farmers to become frustrated in finding actors who understood their concerns, alongside resulted in economic costs, such as paying land agents, family members, and solicitor fees in helping them deal with administrative duties.

Some farmers, however, did undertake certain social entrepreneurial practices to feel less isolated in their farming roles (Case 8.2.4). Many of the social problems identified were also quite closely connected to the environmental constraints facing farmers, which are now discussed.

#### 7.5.4 Environmental Challenges

This study revealed a wide range of environmental constraints facing upland farmers, from poor experiences under existing agri-environmental schemes to the uncertainties surrounding ELMs. Farmers also noted concerns over the unrealistic views members of the public had in regard to 'how agriculture should look' and reflected on the increasing adverse weather conditions which are impacting their businesses.

As farmers transition towards ELMs, concerns were raised over the financial benefits that agri-environmental schemes could offer, with many basing these views on their past experiences of participation in agri-environmental schemes. Some farmers found agri-environmental schemes to be restrictive in nature and conflicting with farm productivity. Those farmers in agri-environmental schemes like the HLS, were economically impacted due to producing poor quality hay. Under the HLS, many farmers receive a hay making supplement and do not cut their grass until later in the year, however, the floods in February 2020 and dry summer resulted in poor grass growth for many farmers.

Moreover, many farmers reported the agri-environmental schemes as being damaging to the environment, arguing that project officers in Natural England do not understand the practicalities in running a farm and caring for the environment. One farmer commented on how she refused to carry out the work on her environmental scheme because of the environmental damage it would have to her land, Claire said:

“We find the [environmental] schemes too restrictive. We are really keen on the environment, really keen on sustainable farming but the rules and regulations to us just don’t make sense... We’ve had to remove all these trees, using heavy tractors and winches which [laughs] don’t make sense and the landscape suffers, wildlife suffers, and the animals suffer.”

Concerns over past experiences of existing agri-environmental schemes have led some farmers to adopt a pessimistic approach to the ELMs. An agricultural stakeholder I interviewed raised concerns over the implementation of ELMs, suggesting at present it is unclear how exactly ELMs will replace BPS.





Photo 10 Red Admiral Caterpillar (Author Generated)

Many farmers were concerned with how the public perceives environmental farming, arguing that they often think rearing beef and sheep is environmentally damaging. Rust et al. (2021) notes that the public generally perceives environmental farming to

mean stocking less livestock on farms, with more trees and wildlife equalling a more environmentally sustainable farm. However, interviews from agricultural stakeholders challenged this public perception, arguing that British livestock farming has some of the highest environmental standards in the world. Moreover, the stakeholders argued how managing the environment and livestock often work well together, as livestock emissions can be offset via net-zero farming practices, with livestock helping to graze agricultural land and create a romanticized imagery symbolic of the 'rural idyll' (Bell, 2006). Some farmers noted how public perceptions of environmental farming should be challenged. While planting trees can help mitigate against flooding, it has to be targeted as it can conflict with existing grazing and grassland management practices. Moreover, whilst 'rewilding' is often discussed in the media about its positive effects on wildlife, it can be counter intuitive when it comes to food production and security, as farmers need grazing land to produce products for domestic and international markets. This finding supports Rust et al. (2021) work that the views of the general public and the practices of farmers are often misaligned. However, it is clear that at times farming and the environment does clash. Photo 10 above illustrates invasive weeds in one farmer's field which are about to be cut, yet these weeds are also a natural habitat for the declining insect population. Farmers are often left with difficult choices between sustainable farming and achieving farm profitability.

Climate change and other weather-related problems were also identified as challenges to many farming businesses. The Spring floods, Summer droughts and Winter blizzards have had economic impacts on many farm businesses. Throughout this research, I have captured how farmers have been responding to some of the environmental challenges on their farms. I asked Sarah what the biggest challenge facing her is, she replied:

"Climate change [confidently]."



Some photographs were taken when conducting the fieldwork illustrate some of the weather-related challenges facing upland farmers.



Photo 11 A waterlogged field, run off water headed straight for the valley town below (author generated)

Photo 11 above was taken on my farm in January 2021, after four weeks of sub-minus temperatures and a torrential downpour of rain. Our field is completely waterlogged with streams of rainwater running down. This mixture of freezing temperatures and high rainfall will not only impact the quality of our grass and feed for the animals, but has also been causing livestock issues. Many of our sheep became lame and had to be

brought in off the moors to have their feet treated (photo 12 below). Indeed, flooding is always a problem on our upland farm, with regular damage to our fields, barns, properties and roads.



Photo 12 lame sheep (Author Generated)

Upland farmers must adapt their farm businesses to the harsh environments they operate within, selecting hardy hill breeds that can cope with the environmental challenges of the uplands. The sheep had to be brought in from the fields and the moors more times this year to ensure they were in a healthy condition.





Photo 13 A ewe receiving penicillin for an infection and having its feet checked (author generated)



Photo 14 repairing the cow shed after a storm (author generated)

The prior sections have showed the ongoing battles farmers are facing with the environment. Upcoming policy change means farmers will be incentivised for producing environmental services, which one day [hopefully] might reduce these ongoing environmental impacts. While the prior sections have presented an overview of some of the personal, economic, social and environmental challenges facing farmers, it is also worth acknowledging that this thesis has been carried out during the COVID-19 pandemic, which added further constraints to farming businesses. The following section discusses the impact of COVID-19 pandemic on upland farm businesses.

### 7.5.5 COVID-19 Constraints

The findings in this section show upland farmers' challenges and entrepreneurial responses throughout the first lockdown period in March 2020. This contributes to the emerging crisis management literature on how entrepreneurs respond to the implications of the COVID-19 pandemic (Phillipson et al., 2020). No studies have explored upland farmer impacts and responses to the ongoing pandemic. Both the economic and social implications of COVID-19 are now explored.

#### *Economic shocks and responses*

Those farmers who ran primarily commercial farm businesses, initially felt a price drop as supply chains re-adjusted to the closure of the food markets. Hank, a senior member of an agricultural trade body, provides some insight into this:

“The issues we see all derive from the closure of the food service markets. So, you know close on 50% of all the calories we consume are consumed outside of the home. People are not going out to eat at restaurants and bars and all that. And if you see that market close overnight you have all this product which has to go through retail, butcher shops and supermarkets. Realigning those supply chains is a real challenge. We saw both beef and lamb price under pressure while those supply chains cope with the changing times. The closure of restaurants for example, wow, as you can imagine that really impacts on the price of lamb... Lamb prices literally fell out of bed overnight. We saw lamb prices fall 30/40 pounds a head.” (See Appendix 2 for transcript)

However, those farmers who had diversified their farm businesses away from commercial supply chains through farm shop meat boxes could accommodate demands where shoppers faced supermarket stockouts due to panic buying. This

showed the vulnerability of Just in Time supply chains (Lever, 2020) and showed how local rural businesses could respond entrepreneurially to supply this demand. Claire, a farmer from Exmoor told me about how she has experienced the effect of COVID-19 on-farm shop meat boxes:

“Honestly we have never been busier with our meat boxes. Everybody was ringing us up. There was so many wanting local, and it wasn’t about national food security anymore, it was about local food security. I think you’ve not only got to have national food security but to a certain extent local food security as well because some people really were in those couple of weeks unable to get food on the supermarket shelves.”

It appears then that diversification into farm shop meat boxes has allowed those more entrepreneurially orientated farmers to respond to rises in demand. However, it is questionable how long farmers can sustain this demand as supermarkets re-adjust their supply chains, as typically farm shop meat boxes are higher priced than supermarket products.

However, farm diversification is not a suitable farm business strategy for all farmers. Rebecca, a senior member of an agricultural trade body, states ‘diversification is not a silver bullet’, suggesting that there has to be a need for it and farmers have the competencies to do it well. While some farmers could sustain farm business income through farm diversification activities throughout the pandemic, other farmers who had diversified into the tourism sectors, such as doing weddings and having camping/glamping sites, suffered financial losses. Sarah, a farmer from Exmoor says:

“[sighs upsettingly] my husband works outside the farm and his contracts have stopped. So that has impacted money coming into the farm. And also, we have like diversification where we started up sort of food events and we do wood



fire pizza, and all of that has stopped [laughs nervously]. We are okay sort of at the moment because we always have a reserve fund, but I think that in a few months' time we'll see the big hits of not having the income now."

But as we have identified earlier in the literature, entrepreneurial farmers and conventional farmers are not the only types of farmers, many farmers undergo contract work and work on other farms. These types of farmers were also impacted throughout the pandemic. Simon, a part-time tenant farmer from Lancashire shared his experience:

"Covid has affected me big style... The farmer I work for is in hospital, he gives me £12 per hour, 10 hours a day that's £120 a day that's a good wage... I've only been able to work on one farm, because he is vulnerable as in over 70, so I couldn't go and work on other farmers because of you know cross contamination and all that... The only other clippings I've done besides him and mine is your dad's, so I've lost a lot of income from all of that. It's been devastating."



Photo 15 Farmers Guardian (<https://www.fginsight.com/news/news/farmers-opt-to-discard-and-burn-fleeces-in-response-to-wool-price-collapse-109930>)

Farmers were also impacted economically speaking beyond their conventional livestock rearing and selling practices. Most sheep farmers clip their flock and sell to the wool marketing board. However, the pandemic impacted the wool trade, with some wool boards either not accepting wool or giving low prices for the commodity. It was cheaper and more convenient for some farmers to burn the wool (Photo 15 above).

However, some farmers were able to respond to this wool crisis via entrepreneurial means. Gordon, a 73-year-old farmer from Lancashire, and his son started their own wool collection service, paying farmers a higher rate than the wool marketing board and selling it to independent crafters. Gordon states:

“We’ve also started a collection centre for the wool buying, we are buying wool in the area... Yeah we used to do it with the wool board, we used to run training courses and everything else here but for the last three years we have been purchasing it ourselves, well my son has, and sell it direct for buying... This wool job has taken off now, big time with us.”

This shows that whilst some farmers view these emergent COVID-19 impacts as constraints, others can leverage entrepreneurial thinking and turn these threats into opportunities. Some of the social impacts associated with the ongoing pandemic are now explored.



Some of the data collected shows the social constraints facing farmers. As mentioned earlier, farmers live increasingly isolated lives where they spend a large majority of their time working by themselves. Often the only times when farmers interact with others is at the local pub, farmers markets and agricultural shows.

Angela, an agricultural stakeholder, comments on how the pandemic has socially impacted farmers:

“It’s a difficult one for the sheep sector, it is a very isolated role, so we do see a lot of problems arising with mental health, in particular a high suicide rate when compared to other sectors. Farmers spend a lot of the year working alone, and on the back of the covid 19 pandemic, lots of farmers use the livestock market as their only source of social interaction, maybe going once or twice a week, and that would be the only time they could interact with people all day, week or month. I mean I’ve not noticed any new stats to show an increase in suicides but, I just know before covid 19 isolation, high suicide rates and isolation has always been a big part of our media campaigns.”

Moreover, there have been reports of increased urban to rural migration since lockdown (Marsh, 2020). As the country has been through a state of lockdowns over the past year, there has been an increase of people living in urban areas visiting the countryside, reported by farmers. This migration has been both positive in that those farmers who also run rural businesses (i.e. ,farm shops, glamping pods etc.) have been able to capitalise on this, however there have also been some challenges presented. The findings here resonate with the interface between rural and urban noted within the literature review (Rizov and Walsh, 2011):

“We’ve had numerous times visitors bringing their dogs here and letting them run loose around our sheep, you know causing them to have abortions and miscarriages. Not sticking to footpaths and getting chased by our cattle. We’ve even had one family that’s dog savaged all of our chickens and ducks. The cheeky bastards even blamed us for it for having them run loose round the farm. Oh, it can be awful at times... But I do love having people come to the farm. It can be lonely otherwise. He’s all up for working by himself and being grumpy and that but he loves it really.”

Farmer Mike noticed an increase in the number of walkers coming through his farm since the pandemic, putting signs up to discourage walkers.



Photo 16 Educating Urban Visitors (Author Generated)

Mike, a more traditionalist type farmer, talked to me about the concerns he has with the general public, which stemmed from a lengthy and costly legal battle he encountered when one of his cows injured a walker with a dog. On each of his gates reads a sign “Be Aware! Suckler Cows with Calves. No Dogs!” Mike regards this incident as:

“One of the lowest points of farming. My cattle have grazed near footpaths ever since I can remember, and I’ve never had any bother. No farmer fences there fields off, every night I look across to my neighbours and his cows are out on the footpath passing dogs. Ever since the incident I just hate dealing with the public.”



Photo 17 enclose area of common land (author generated)

Interestingly, whilst public footpaths are constraints to some farm businesses (Mike's enterprise), other farmers see them as a diversification opportunity. It appears then that the interaction between rural and urban communities can be both positive and negative, it is relative to how orientated the farm business is to the general public. The public can be a facilitator in the farm business, particularly if farmers plan to diversify their farm businesses towards the general population's needs. However, in some cases, farmers may choose to pursue farm business strategies that do not involve the general public. Interestingly, excellent access to farms via public footpaths and walking routes can indeed be constraints to farm businesses, it is all relative to individual farmers and their contexts. This contributes to the literature on the 'rural-urban' divide (Rizov and Walsh, 2011; Bowen et al., 2019). Indeed, COVID-19 appears to have amplified interactions between the rural and the urban, presenting opportunities for those entrepreneurially orientated farmers and causing challenges for others.

Finally, one of the most significant social challenges resulting from the pandemic was adapting to the virtual world. This is interesting because even those farmers that can be considered more entrepreneurial in nature can be limited by factors outside of their control, such as having poor broadband connectivity and limited phone signal. Claire comments on this:

"We have no mobile signal here. And all this Covid thing is really highlighting the problem. There's no mobile signal and our internet is about 1mb if we are lucky. Whereas I think most peoples is about 30mb now [laughs]. I was saying if we're all going to go more towards internet and that sort of stuff, which I hope we do, we've got to have that mobile internet and access."

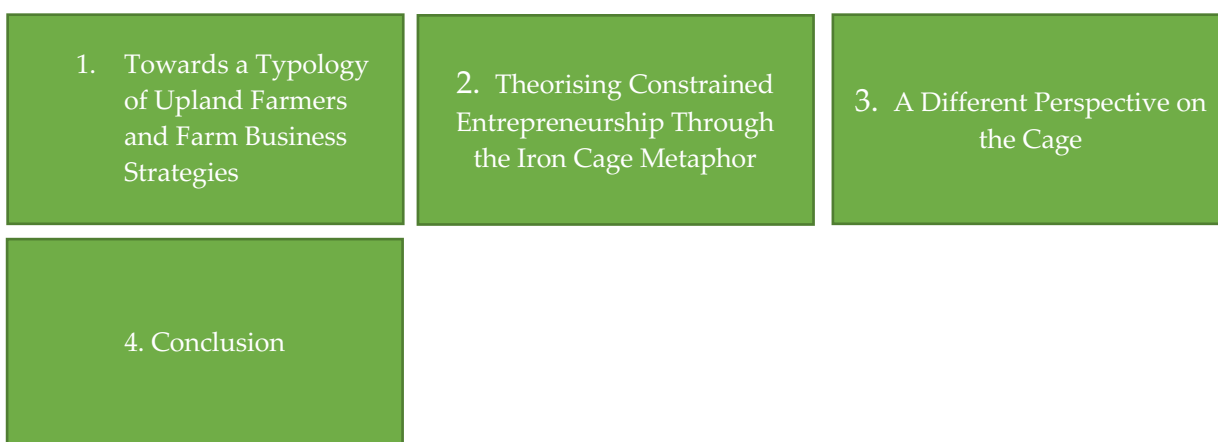


Many urban businesses have had to adapt to the virtual world, however, this transition has been difficult in the rural economies. Many farmers, due to their location as highlighted by Claire, have broadband and connectivity issues. Dymitrow and Stenseke (2016) argue that the rural-urban divide is becoming 'increasingly blurred' due to technology. Yet, the findings here show quite the opposite, highlighting how some rural areas have lagged behind during the pandemic. For those farmers to capitalise on increasing demands during the pandemic, farmers have needed to leverage specific [entrepreneurial] skillsets and competencies, such as engaging in online marketing, branding and technological skillsets. Indeed, Apostolopoulos et al. (2021) notes the importance of digitalization in a post-covid rural world but does not acknowledge the constraints that prevent farmers from embracing digitalisation. COVID-19 has highlighted issues around rural areas adapting to digitalisation, suggesting both a lack of rural infrastructure and farmer skillsets which constrain entrepreneurial activities.

## 7.6 Chapter Summary

Throughout this findings and discussion chapter, several key findings are evident. Shown through an analysis of the empirical data, great heterogeneity exists amongst English upland farmers. The contemporary constraints and challenges facing upland farmers have been explored (RQ1), showing how various macro and micro-level challenges and constraints are impacting upland farmers. Indeed, much of the interview data comprised the social challenges facing farmers. Existing work focuses on the economic (financial) challenges but does not explore the social constraints facing farmers (Franks et al., 2020). This study contributes to such efforts. The following chapter builds upon these findings in a theoretical manner.

## Chapter Eight: Theorizing Constrained Entrepreneurship in the English Uplands



### 8.0 Introduction

The prior chapter has shown that upland farmers face an array of economic, social, and environmental challenges that can constrain farm entrepreneurship. The aim of this chapter is to present and discuss the theoretical contributions which emerge from these findings.

This chapter is structured as follows. First, a typology of farmers and their farm business strategies used to respond to the realities in the sector are presented, arguing that upland farmers should not be recognised as a homogeneous group (Section 8.1). Second, the challenges facing upland farmers are theorised through the study's theoretical underpinning, drawing upon other variations of the iron cage metaphor to contextualise de Bruin and Dupuis's (2003) concept of 'constrained entrepreneurship' to help meet the research aim (Section 8.2). Theoretical extensions of the cage metaphor are provided, arguing how certain types of farmers reside in the different cages, using various types of farm business strategies to respond to the institutional conditions. Third, an alternative perspective on the cage metaphor is presented (Section 8.3), arguing how scholars should move beyond analysing responses to the

institutional forces and look at those creating the cages. Overall, the findings in this chapter discuss the broader implications of how the challenges and constraints impact different types of farmers in different ways. The cage metaphor clearly shows how different types of farmers are responding (i.e., through different business strategies) to the institutional conditions. This chapter contains some important theoretical discussions that provide a nuanced understanding of how farmers respond to the beef and sheep sector challenges.

## 8.1 A typology of farmers and their farm business strategies

Throughout the analytical phase, various typologies were created showing the heterogeneous nature of upland farmers. These typologies are now presented and discussed. My industry insider positionality has aided the creation of the ideal types while considering the empirical data presented in the previous chapter.

An important note should be mentioned here. These are Weberian influenced ideal types (Swedberg, 2018a). Whilst they have been created through empirical data, they represent an ideal form of different farmer identities which are conceptually pure and do not exist wholly in empirical reality. There is no such thing as a 'traditionalist farmer' or 'entrepreneurial farmer' in the real-world, farmers may display some elements of the traditionalist farmer type, alongside comprise of mixtures of some of the other types. These five ideal types (table 8.1 below) are now discussed.

Types of Farmers	Types of Farm Business Strategies
Traditionalist farmers	No/reactive strategies
Constrained entrepreneurs & farmers of entrepreneurs	Diversification/innovation based, informal strategies
Farmers as businesspeople	Growth/efficiency driven

Environmentally conscious farmers	Environmentally orientated
Hobbyist and part-time farmers	Social entrepreneurship strategies

Table 8.1 Types of upland farmers and their strategies

### 8.1.1 Traditionalist farmers

Features of the Farmer Segmentation framework	The traditionalist farmer
Personal characteristics	Older aged, typically male, owner farmers, experienced, external locus of control.
Business characteristics	Mid-to large sized farm, limited diversified, not embedded in rural and urban communities
Business activities and processes	Lack of collaboration, limited strategic thinking capabilities, change resistant.

Table 8.1.1 traditional farmer type

Traditionalist farmers (table 8.1.1 above), similar to McElwee (2008a) 'Farmer as Farmer type, are those typically older-aged farmers who might be considered change resisters: the only time in which they consider altering their farm business strategies is if they are forced to do so. These types of farmers have done quite well over their farming careers, they have usually inherited their land from their parents and are in a position where they own most of their land and have minimal farm debts. However, they are careful in how they run their businesses. Diversification strategies are limited. Farmers have profited well from the EU subsidies and the removal of BPS is of little importance, as they soon will be retiring. Technology adoption is limited, costs are largely unmonitored, and farmers are financially sustainable and often are pursuing non-economic goals. Traditionalist farmers may possess an external LoC and typically pursue strategies that are risk-adverse and do not deviate away from core farm activities (Baldegger et al., 2017).



The traditionalist farmer is symbolic of many of the older upland farmers across England. Whilst they may run financially sound businesses and might consider themselves successful, these are the types of farmers which the UK government might want to encourage to leave the farming sector, allowing more entrepreneurially orientated farmers to replace them. Traditionalist farmers might lack strategic thinking capabilities, have no formal farm business strategies, and generally lack core business and management skillsets. Whilst there might be members of the farm family who have their own business goals and entrepreneurial ambitions, traditionalist farmers often hold seniority in the farm business and can constrain entrepreneurial activities. Farm succession might be unplanned, with traditional farmers seeing little value in thinking about the long-term goals of the farming enterprise. Traditionalist farmers do not view the farm as a business, rather it is a lifestyle. This type of farmer is often very difficult to engage with and doesn't want to take any steps to improve or change the farming business. Indeed, conflicts can occur between traditionalist and entrepreneurial farmers in the family business.

### 8.1.2 Entrepreneurial Farmers

Features of the Farmer Segmentation framework	The entrepreneurial farmer
Personal characteristics	Male or female, typically younger, new entrant/off farm experience, tenant farmer, entrepreneurial mindset.
Business characteristics	Could be small (employ bricolage), embedded across different 'spatial contexts', open to diversification or innovating the core business.
Business activities and processes	High levels of innovation and technology adoption, strategic thinking abilities, utilise various support networks.

Table 8.1.2 entrepreneurial farmers

Entrepreneurial farmers (table 8.1.2) are typically younger in age in comparison to traditionalist farmers. They have taken risks to get to the position where they are and are proactive, seeking opportunities to innovate or diversify the farm business (McElwee, 2006). Entrepreneurial farmers may use a variety of diversification and innovation-based strategies to generate income, displaying high levels of strategic thinking capabilities (Heracleous, 1998). Their farm activities span across different spatial contexts (Müller and Korsgaard, 2018), looking for new markets and opportunities to generate additional income for the farm business. Family is a core feature in farm entrepreneurship (Jervell, 2011), utilising skillsets within the family alongside generating social capital (Arnott et al., 2020) through networking beyond initial family and friend contacts (McElwee and Bosworth, 2010). Entrepreneurial farmers will often display ‘bricolage’ (Baker and Nelson, 2005), utilising entrepreneurial skillsets and innovative thinking while operating in resource-constrained environments. Successful farm entrepreneurs will also seek to employ innovative thinking and adopt technology to meet farm business goals (Gittins et al., 2020). Entrepreneurial farmers differ from ‘farmers as business people’ due to their aptitude to innovative, take risks and proactively search for market opportunities.

### 8.1.3 The farmer as a Businessperson

Features of the Farmer Segmentation framework	Farmers as businesspeople
Personal characteristics	Not gender influenced, younger to middle aged, tenant farmers (and those with large overheads).
Business characteristics	Pursue diversified activities for financial reasons (as opposed to non-economic and social), larger farms reach economies of scale, utilises farm labour (family) in a highly efficient manner.
Business activities and processes	Utilises networks beyond family and friends, thinks about the long-term goals of the farming enterprise, utilises data

	and technology as a means to control costs.
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Table 8.1.3 Farmers as businesspeople

Just as entrepreneurs and small business owners are differentiated from one another in the literature, there are also differences between farmers as entrepreneurs and farmers as businesspeople (Carland et al., 1984). The question around ‘are farmers businesspeople’ has been raised by Couzy and Dockes (2008) in the context of French farmers, concluding that the modern-day farmer is becoming more business minded, utilising similar business and management skillsets used throughout other industries in their farming roles. This differentiation has informed the creation of the ideal type ‘the farmer as a businessperson’ (table 8.1.3) in this typology framework.

The farmer as a businessman does not view the farm as a lifestyle, like the traditionalist farmer does, rather it is viewed as an economic unit of analysis (Coase, 1937). Business-minded farmers possess sufficient operational skillsets, understanding that every process on farm has a time and cost (Couzy and Dockes, 2008). These types of farmers generally utilise their land to accommodate as much livestock as possible, monitoring feeding costs and profit in alignment with other income, such as farming subsidies. Business-minded farmers typically utilise technology and collect data on farming processes to help them make better informed livestock and grassland management decisions. They are process-orientated, drawing on support from actors outside of their initial family and friends’ networks to help them make the farm as efficient as possible. The farmer as a businessperson uses strategies that allow them to generate additional income, such as growth acquisition strategies where land size and livestock numbers are increased to realise economies of scale. Moreover, business-minded farmers use cost-cutting strategies and aim to make farm processes as efficient as possible to minimise overheads. However, this

ideal type does not extend to capture the characteristics of other types of upland farmers, such as those more hobbyist and part-time farmers.

#### 8.1.4 Hobbyist and Part-Time Farmers

Features of the Farmer Segmentation framework	Hobbyist and part-time farmers
Personal characteristics	Not gender influenced, typically older and from outside the agricultural sector, entrepreneurially orientated.
Business characteristics	Small scale farmers, diversification, pursuing non-economic and social entrepreneurship goals.
Business activities and processes	Utilises networks beyond family and friends, strategies concerning gaining access to more land (growth acquisition).

Table 8.1.4 Hobbyist and part-time farmers

Hobbyist and part-time farmers are another ideal type of farmer developed through the thesis (table 8.1.4). These farmers do not have their entire lives invested in the farm business and tend to view farming more of a lifestyle choice than a business. They have entered farming, generally not through succession, but because of their passion for agriculture and are typically outsiders to the industry. Though one day these farmers may transition into full-time farming roles.

Hobbyist and part-time farmers typically use farm business strategies centred around non-economic and even social entrepreneurship goals. Rather, some farmers may orchestrate their farm business in non-conventional ways because of their own romantic rural idylls around how farming should be (Mingay, 2017; Dwivedi and Weerawardena, 2018). Farm practices might be orientated to involving the community, as opposed to being tailored towards efficiency goals. Whilst the activities associated with these farmer types may not be the most cost-effective and rationale way of farming, it often has a deeper symbolic and social element, allowing

farmers to become figures in local rural communities, as is seen in Nigel’s case story later in this chapter (Section 8.2.4).

Interestingly, this ideal type provides insight into the social entrepreneurship practices associated with farmers, but not within a traditional sense of what academics consider social entrepreneurship to be (Weerawardena and Mort, 2006). Often in farming businesses these social entrepreneurship practices are incorporated into the farming business in unconventional manners. Meaning that while formal rural farming social enterprises can be set up (i.e., a Community Interest Company), farmers may have social entrepreneurship goals and activities within a commercial enterprise (Dias et al., 2019). These social entrepreneurship activities are often linked to tackling rural issues beyond the economic constraints facing farmers, such as tackling social and environmental challenges in the sector.

#### 8.1.5 Environmentally Conscious Farmers

Features of the Farmer Segmentation framework	Environmentally conscious farmers
Personal characteristics	Personal views on the environment, typically younger farmers were more concerned with climate related issues.
Business characteristics	Adapting farm business and livestock practices around environmental issues, in Agri environmental schemes,
Business activities and processes	Utilises networks beyond family and friends, strategies concerning helping the environment.

Table 8.1.5 Environmentally conscious farmers

Environmentally conscious farmers (table 8.1.5) are aware of how their farm businesses contribute towards achieving environmental sustainability. Often these types of farmers will have a genuine interest in environmental sustainability and their

farming practices will reflect this. Environmental farmers are aware of upcoming policy changes favouring environmental services and are proactive in orientating their farm businesses towards environmental goals. Indeed, this type may resemble the 'Good Farmer' ideal noted in the literature (Naylor et al., 2018), whereby good farmers are connected to the land. Environmental farmers are not pursuing environmentally orientated strategies for primarily profit seeking reasons, rather they have a personal connection with the environment and want to farm in an environmentally sustainable manner.

Farm business strategies are centred around improving the farming environment around them. For example, some farmers might be seeking to calculate their own environmental impacts on their farm, such as calculating carbon capture. Moreover, the livestock system and management practices might be balanced with environmental objectives, such as planting trees and hedgerows around the boundaries of fields. Sustainable and regenerative agriculture, organic farming and re-wilding are terms often associated with the environmental farmer type, with these farming methods perceived as being environmentally friendly by the public (Rust et al., 2021) .

Environmentally conscious farmers are aware of the ongoing policy shifts to make farming and food production respond to climate change-related issues. Because of their personal environmental beliefs, they are thinking proactively about what environmental services they can produce through their farm businesses and thinking ahead about how they will farm under the ELMs.

### 8.1.6 Constrained Entrepreneurs

Features of the Farmer Segmentation framework	The Constrained Entrepreneur
Personal characteristics	Typically, younger farmers and those which lack seniority in the farm business.
Business characteristics	Tennant farmers. Location and topographical features can constrain the business, by having a lack of access to resources.
Business activities and processes	Strategies are orchestrated to overcome the constraints. Farmers can also be constrained by their own skillsets.

Table 8.1.6 Constrained entrepreneurs

Constrained entrepreneurs (table 8.1.6) reflect those farmers who want to engage in farm entrepreneurship, however, personal constraints prevent them from doing so. de Bruin and Dupuis's (2003) term 'constrained entrepreneurship' underpins this specific farmer type which is underpinned by a dominant economic theory, namely Transaction Cost Economics. However, in this research it is used in a much broader and fluid sense, noting that farm entrepreneurs can be constrained by economic, social and environmental constraints (discussed in the prior chapter). Constrained entrepreneurship considers the Constrained Institutional Context in which entrepreneurs operate within, acknowledging that entrepreneurs are always bounded in some ways by various constraints (Refai and McElwee, 2021). Indeed, [farm] entrepreneurs can overcome constraints, however, there will always be limitations in which entrepreneurs are limited by. For example, some entrepreneurs are limited by personal finances, skillsets, landlord relationships, rural resources, age *inter alia* and often these constraints are difficult to overcome.

Constrained entrepreneurs might use various [entrepreneurial] strategies to meet their economic and non-economic business goals. Farmers who possess high levels of strategic thinking capabilities (Heracleous, 1998a) and network with people outside

of family and friend networks (Bosworth and McElwee, 2010) can often find ways to overcome, or at least manage, these relative constraints to farm entrepreneurship (de Bruin and Dupuis, 2003). However, some constraints cannot be overcome, thus creating constrained entrepreneurs. In summary, constrained entrepreneurs possess both entrepreneurial skillsets and strategic thinking capabilities, however, the extent in which these can be leveraged is constrained by certain contextual factors surrounding the farm business and rural environment farmers operate within.

#### 8.1.7 Typology Reflection and Implications

The creation of this typology has extended existing entrepreneurship debates around differentiating between entrepreneurs and businesspeople, focussing specifically within rural contexts. The farmer ideal types reflect how farmers construct their own [entrepreneurial] identities (Fitz-Koch et al., 2017) based upon multiple dimensions: how they view the farm, whether it is viewed as a business (which can be enhanced through entrepreneurial ventures and innovation), or as a lifestyle whereby more non-economic and social entrepreneurship strategies come into place. This builds on the earlier finding that farmers are not a homogenous group, showing the nature of characteristics of different types of upland farmers and provides insight into the farm business strategies farmers are using to respond to the realities within the sector.

Finally, it is useful to reflect upon my positionality within the typology. I would say that I do not necessarily fit with any one type, rather I am a mixture of all the types. For example, I am not a full-time farmer, whilst I do work on the family farm, my career ambitions are outside of the agricultural sector, mainly due to poor profitability challenges in the industry. In some ways, I regard myself as a 'constrained entrepreneur', I do not maintain the traditional views of my father in regard to agriculture, who is against any form of tourism-related diversification. Our farming identities clash at times. Moreover, whilst working on the farm I have also earned income off the farm too, doing agricultural contract work and trading beyond the farm



gate. I also see value in networking beyond family and friend networks, something which my father does not do. Indeed, I can relate to the problems which arise from working in a family business. My dad is someone who, although he might 'officially retire', I'm sure would still have control and authority within the farming business for many years. I have seen from the farms around me that succession and the transfer of authority is a lengthy process, with ultimate control of the farming business not passed until death. For me, working with my family with no clear succession plan, with low wages and potentially not having much authority in the farming business for many years is not appealing. Although, in the future I hope to buy some land and runs some diversified farm activities of some sort.

This notion of myself within the typology framework not aligning to any particular 'type' is representative of one of the main criticisms of the Weberian Ideal type (Swedberg, 2018a). Norbert Elias is sceptical of ideal types not being representative of reality (Kilminster, 1987), when applied to any given-on example (i.e., myself amongst the typology) they do not appear to represent reality. However, the creation of Weberian influenced ideal type have helped theorise the heterogenic nature of upland farmers, creating various types of farmers, farm businesses and farm business strategies. A contribution is made here which extends existing literature on farmer typologies. McElwee's (2008) four ideal types of farmers are extended, the 'traditionalist farmer' I created provides insight into the trait based (Carland et al., 1988) and behaviour reasons (Gartner, 1988) as to why some farmers do not pursue entrepreneurial strategies. 'Farmers as entrepreneurs' are extended by linking in de Bruin's (2000) concept of 'constrained entrepreneurship', creating the 'constrained entrepreneur.' Moreover, other work cited in the literature review is synthesised to present other types of farmers, such as 'farmers as businesspeople' incorporating the work of Couzy and Dockes (2008). The 'environmentally conscious farmer' is created, incorporating the work of Rust et al. (2021) who notes the important consideration farmers must give for environmental sustainability. Moreover, part-time and hobbyist

farmer types are created to discuss the social entrepreneurial practices associated with upland farming.

The typology has highlighted the heterogenic nature of upland farmers, showing that different types of farmers face relative challenges and use various business strategies. Now that this has been presented, it is important to understand these types in relation the institutional conditions (i.e., the cages) in which they operate in. The study's theoretical underpinning is now returned to, discussing how farmers have been responding to the constraints facing them in reference to the three adaptations of the cage metaphor outlined in chapter four (Section 5.3).

## 8.2 Theorising Through the Iron Cage

Max Weber's metaphor of the iron cage of bureaucracy and rationality has formed the dominant theoretical underpinning within this research. Weberian concepts around the themes of rationalization, bureaucracy and social action were explored to understand the phenomena of de Bruin and Dupois (2003) concept of 'constrained entrepreneurship' in the context of upland farming (Section 8.1.6). Doing this helps meet the second research question identified in the literature review:

- How might the challenges facing English upland beef and sheep farmers be constraining of entrepreneurial activity?

Weber's metaphor of the iron cage, alongside other notable adaptations from the sociological literature (Klagge, 1997; Weber, 2001; Ritzer, 2011; Ritzer et al., 2018), are now discussed in relation to the constraints and challenges facing English upland farmers. Throughout these sub-sections, the relative constraints and challenges facing upland farmers are seen, showing how different types of farmers use various farm business strategies to respond to the challenges in the sector. These variants of the

cage metaphor, alongside their applicability to the context of upland farming are now discussed in the following sub-sections.

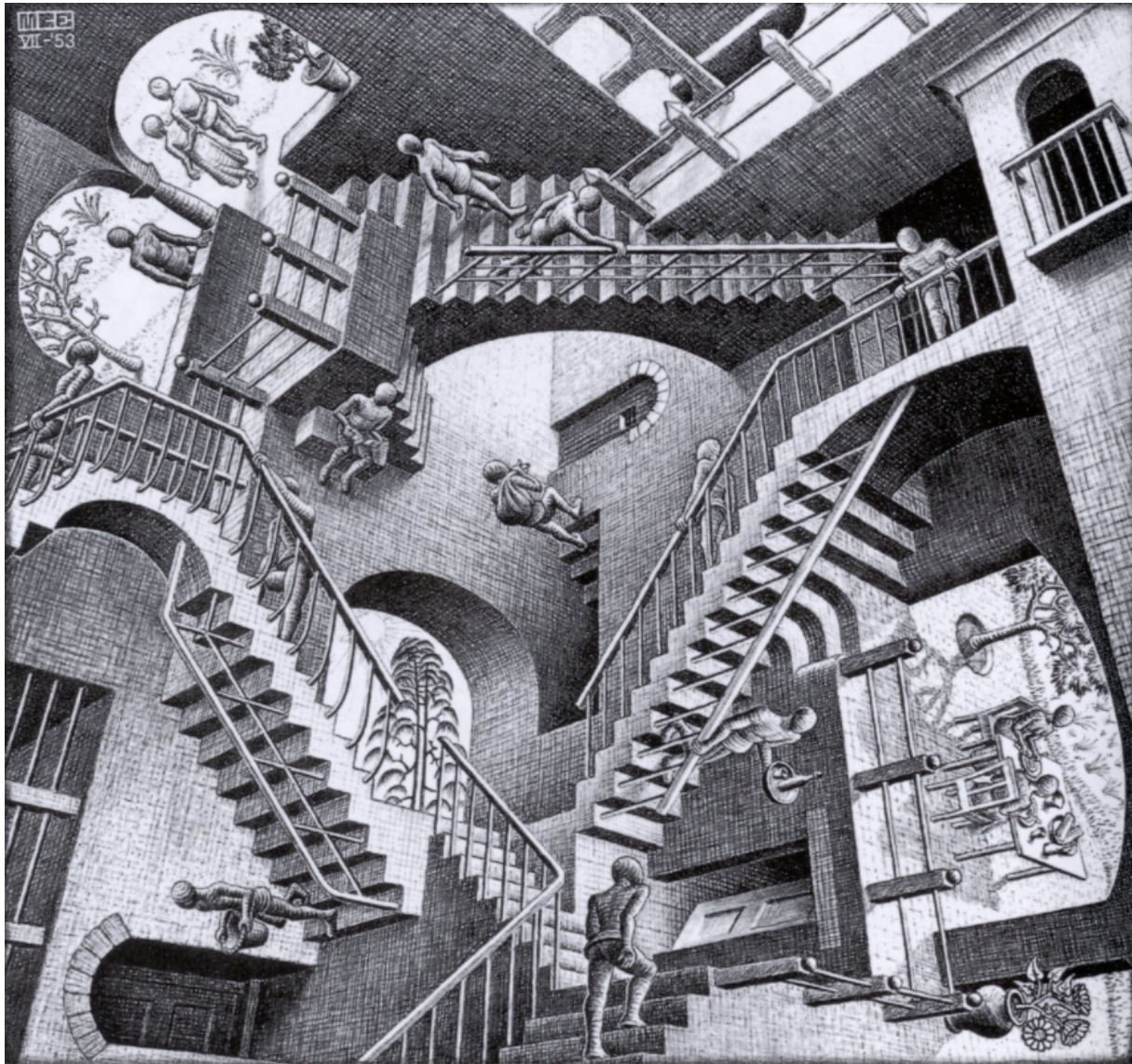


Figure 8.2 Realising Weber's metaphor of the iron cage through Escher's work

Figure 8.2 above illustrates the relativist ontological positioning adopted within this study. It was my job to enter the different farmer worlds to make sense of the challenges facing them, understanding approaches to farm entrepreneurship and strategic management (Kuehne, 2008; McElwee, 2008b). Yet, entering these worlds revealed the relativity of farmer worlds visualised in Escher's image. The remainder

of this chapter extends Weber's work in the context of upland farming, drawing inspiration from the relativist component of Escher's work to argue that three types of cages exist which can be used to understand the phenomena of constrained entrepreneurship in the English uplands.

### 8.2.1 The Weberian Iron Cage (Stahlhartes Gehäuse)

The cage presented in this section builds upon Weber's iron cage in the Protestant Ethic (Weber, 2003), taking a cynical view regarding rationalization and bureaucracy. Escher's 'relativity' symbolises how inhabitants of the iron cage work specialised and autonomous roles, subjected to alienation in the workplace and in their own lives. Weber (1987) in *Economy and Society* regards the modern bureaucratic organisation as being 'ignorant of human emotions' and being 'among the hardest to destroy' (Swedberg and Agevall, 2020). Many of the traditionalist farmers and constrained entrepreneurs viewed bureaucracies (i.e., administrative tasks, dealing with public authorities etc.) to be particularly constraining to farm business activities. These types of farmers resided in the classic Weberian iron cage. Oliver summarises the general view towards bureaucracy held by these types of farmers:

"Bureaucracy and regulations? As in the standards, the red tape, health and safety and all that shit."

Mann (2018) suggests that industries that receive high levels of government support are subjected to higher levels of bureaucratic control and regulation. As agricultural subsidies are funded by taxpayer money and enforced through various government administrative bodies, it is expected measures will be in place to protect any misallocation of funds. Many of the older aged farmers regarded administrative duties and excessive bureaucracy as a key constraint to their businesses, resulting in

high levels of stress. In particular, farmers noted the restrictions associated with agri-environmental schemes as being counter-intuitive to British agriculture (Section 7.5.4). Indeed, for the more traditionally orientated farmers, the increasing bureaucracies associated with modern farming almost have become too constraining to business activities. The following case study highlights how one farmer has been burdened with increasing bureaucratic control.



## **A Cage within a Cage. Mike's Battle with Bureaucracy: TB, Satellite Mapping and a Global Pandemic.**

“My environmental payments have been delayed due to some boundary mapping issues, we are also currently in a TB lockdown due to having a suspected reactor on our farm... That's not to mention some of the issues I have been having in some properties I own... All this has happened within a global crisis.” (Mike)

It has been a tough year for Mike, financially speaking. Due to a case of TB being found in the local area, all farms within a three-mile radius need to test their cattle for the disease. This adds stress to his daily realities of farming throughout a global pandemic.

*Dealing with TB restrictions*



TB Testing November 2020 Mike's Farm (Photo 17) (Author Generated)

On a wet winter morning Mike and the labourers ran each cow through the run to test them for TB. Mike said confidently before the test:

"We have never in all of our years had a reactor on this farm. We won't have one today, I can tell you that!"

Photo 18 shows the TB testing process. An injection is administered in each cow's neck, the vet returns two days later to measure the size of the lump. A size over a certain measurement indicates that the cow might TB positive.



Injection sites TB (Photo 18) (Defra)

The news from the test is not good:

"I'm very sorry to inform you that one of the results has come back inconclusive."

Mike's cows were re-tested a couple of days later, where one cow received an inconclusive result. The inconclusive test meant Mike was effectively in a 'lockdown' on the farm, unable to sell any cattle at auction for sixty days until the vet returned and re-tested the isolated cow.

The vet returned sixty days later and re-tested the cow, it came back inconclusive again, which according to Defra's guidelines meant the cow must be sent for slaughter. The cow was now registered as a reactor and must be slaughtered and Mike's entire herd must be re-tested again in 60 days' time, with further restrictions on selling livestock imposed.

On the second test of his herd, Mike was given the 'all clear' and he could begin trading as normal. Ironically, he also received a letter informing him that the sample from the slaughtered cow had been tested in a lab for traces of TB. The test came back negative, with the cow never having TB. Whilst elated to be free from TB on his farm and the government restrictions removed, his dealings with government departments did not end there.



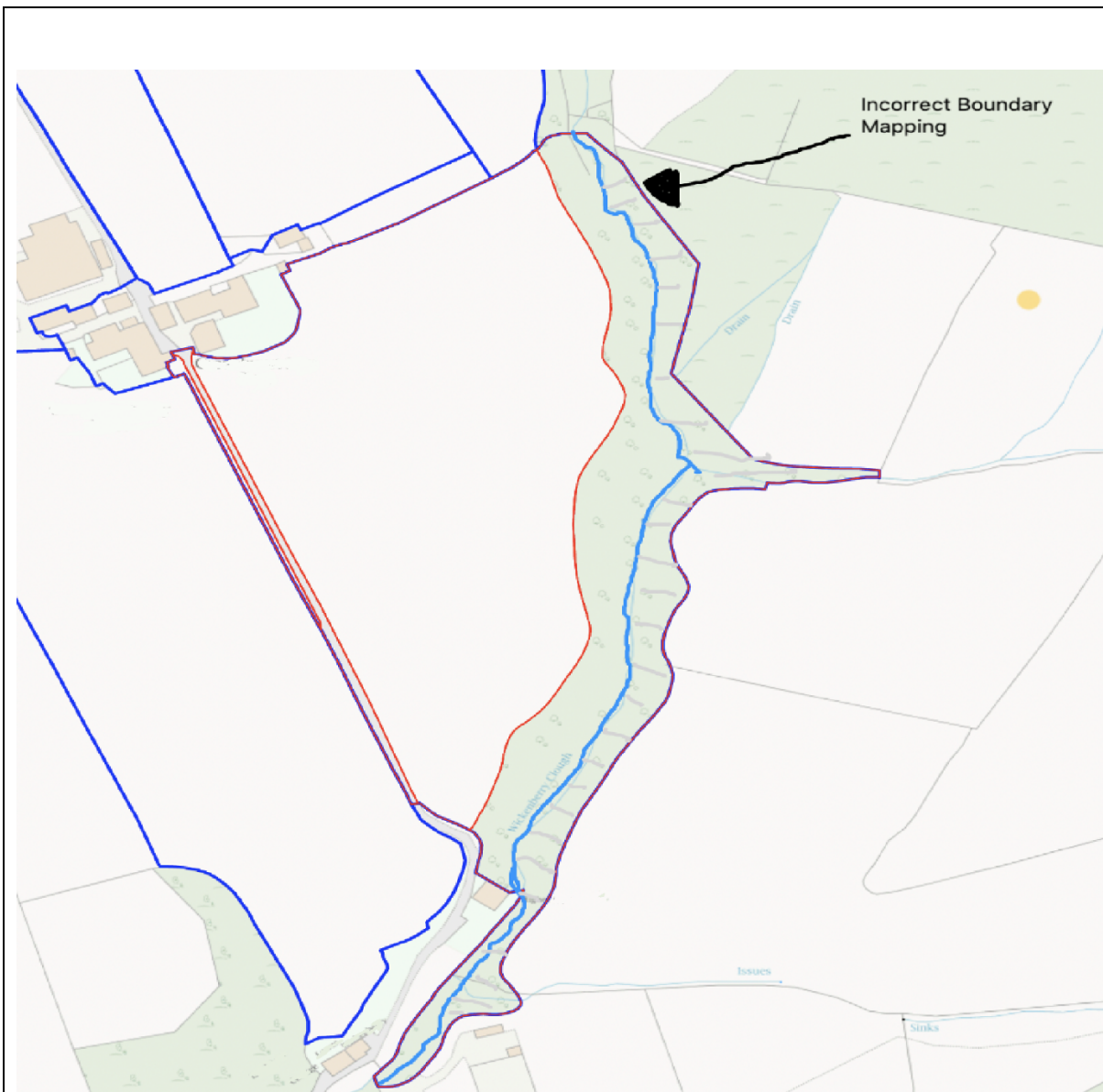


Figure 8.2.1 Lines drawn by author Defra ordinance map

Mike received a letter from the Rural Payments Agency informing him of some overpayments on some parcels of land he owns (Image 3). For the past ten years, Mike has unknowingly been overpaid in his agri-environmental scheme (approximately 0.75 hectares of woodland area). Effectively claiming income for land which did not belong to him.

Mike paid a land agent to set up his agri-environmental scheme almost ten years ago, as he does not possess the skillsets himself to monitor and update his records.

As a result of this, the mistake went unnoticed and Mike received financial penalties. The area shaded in grey (Figure 8.2.1), highlights the mapping issue. Mike has now been informed that until he reviews and recalculates his environmental scheme claim and updates his records, he will be ineligible to receive his payments and will have to pay back with interest the money he was overpaid.

So not only has Mike been unable to sell his cattle for the past 120 days, but he also now faces considerable delays in the payment of his agri-environmental schemes. All of this is occurring within a global pandemic. Mike is faced with excessive levels of bureaucracy which are constraining his business.

### Case Study 8.2.1

This case study shows the ongoing struggles some upland farmers are facing in dealing with government restrictions. As Mike perseveres through the restrictions imposed on his farm business because of the TB outbreak, he is burdened with further administrative duties of re-assessing his environmental schemes and facing delayed and reduced payments. As he finally breaks out of one iron cage (i.e., TB restrictions), he enters another, (i.e., satellite mapping issues) then another (i.e., property issues).

Indeed, the role of bureaucracy and other underpinning concepts of the iron cage metaphor are interesting when applied to the agricultural sector. More traditionalist type farmers tend to view bureaucracy in a cynical way, viewing government regulations and restrictions purely as constraints that prevent them from farming how they like. Administrative duties can impact some upland farmers both economically and socially speaking, requiring those farmers who do not have the skillsets and capabilities to pay someone to handle them on their behalf. Many farmers noted issues in trying to communicate with actors in government departments, such as Natural England and the RPA, questioning their real-world experience and knowledge of farming systems, symbolic of the rural-urban divide (Rizov and Walsh, 2011).

However, Weber's view of the modern bureaucratic organisation does not readily apply itself to family farming businesses, which may be considered more adhocratic in nature than bureaucratic (Dolan, 2010). Farm businesses are often run by families, whereby there are generally no formal rules, visions, goals, and values communicated on a frequent basis, with approaches to strategic management often being informal in nature. When these adhocratic businesses meet increasing bureaucratic government restrictions, difficulties can arise. For traditionalist type farmers who are older and lack entrepreneurial skillsets and support networks, these imposed restrictions on their adhocratic farming enterprises can, indeed, feel like an 'ever increasing iron cage' (Weber, 2003). Farmers then have a choice in how they want to respond to these institutional challenges through various farm business strategies, such as by doing nothing, cost cutting, increasing production, exiting the farm business or diversifying (Section 3.4.5). It is evident that the bureaucracies associated with modern farming can be troublesome for more traditionally orientated farmers, suggesting an opportunity for policymakers to place greater support on helping those older aged farmers who lack sufficient skillsets to deal with the constraints associated with imposed and increasing regulations.

However, dealing with government departments were not the only source of constraints found. The following case study demonstrates how constraints can occur at the micro level, through toxic landlord relationships.

### **A Story of Constrained Entrepreneurship. A Clash Between Landlords and Tenants.**

The Forest of Bowland National Park is an AONB that attracts thousands of visitors to enjoy the rural trails and scenery. It is also home to Josh Langerton, a sixty-year-old tenant farmer who runs a sheep only livestock system with his wife, Barbara. Josh and Barbara had an enterprising idea, but it was constrained by his toxic landlord relationship.

Inside Josh's barn is a remarkable structure containing 19th century cruck beams, only one of ten standing across Lancashire. Josh had a diversification plan centred around this unique structure, he wanted to restore the building professionally and turn it into a local tourist attraction. His farm is easily accessible both by road for vehicles and has several public footpaths running through his farm. Barbara was keen on the diversification plan too, wanting to support Josh's idea and had plans for opening a farm café.





Photo 19 Cruck beams ([http://www.greatbarns.org.uk/hall\\_barns\\_stonyhurst.html](http://www.greatbarns.org.uk/hall_barns_stonyhurst.html))

Josh arranged to meet with a historical architect and a farm business advisor to discuss his diversification plan:

“A chap came up from Worcester to assess this building, he was an expert in historic buildings. He dated it within a 20-year window and said the walls were built in the 19th century. He said if you allow us to demolish it and build it the way it should have been built, we’ll make it a highlight in publicity locally and increase the number of visitors and people coming to this part of Lancashire... I said terrific, that sounds fantastic. So, they put a plan together and set it up at £400,000. There were only four builders in the country that were qualified to do it because of the historic nature of the building. I was really excited for it.”

After evaluating the idea, the next stage was to inform his landlord and then submit applications to the local planning authorities, a stage he was dreading. Josh had doubts at this stage, due to the traditionalist nature of his landlord. However, the plan never reached the planning application stage:

“The landlord said no, ‘we don’t want extra walkers coming through the fields.’ Now I was absolutely livid. I was absolutely livid. I thought there was a real opportunity here to have a bit of a retail outlet here in the farmyard. My wife could have worked part-time, she was thinking of selling sandwiches and cakes and so on. And it just fit in with everything we did. We have a good story to tell, I like engaging with the public, we have footpaths criss-crossing the farm in every direction and we are two miles from the local college. We thought it was a real opportunity, but the landlord said ‘no. we’re not having it.’ I pleaded almost on my knees begging to have this opportunity. I’m sorry this is not a very positive story, Peter.”

Josh has both tangible resources (buildings, barns, roads) and intangible (skillsets, networks, supports) skillsets to initiate a potentially very successful diversification plan. However, the personal constraints, in his case his landlord, stopped this plan. For now, this unique structure will remain hidden and out of the public view in Lancashire.

#### Case 8.2.2

It appears that the tenant and the landlord in the case study both had different visions for the identity of the farm (Fitz-Koch et al., 2017). Josh wanted to pursue a diversification strategy, whilst his landlord wanted to maintain a more private and traditional identity, keeping to the core activities of the farm (i.e., sheep breeding). As the landlord held more power in this situation, there was little Josh could do. Josh is a constrained entrepreneur, operating within a restrictive cage created by his landlord, a more powerful actor. The case study above is symbolic of certain rural actors' power and domination over one another. For Josh, the person that exercises domination and power over his business is not someone sitting in a government building mile away (Section 8.2.2), it is his landlord that he has to deal with on a regular basis. Josh is entrepreneurial and has visions for growth, however his landlord has constrained him due to a conflict of interest.

Issues around power relationships and domination were found to be particularly prominent at the microlevel. Within farming enterprises, issues relating to the family can arise. The role of family in farm entrepreneurship as Jervell (2011) finds is a complex phenomenon. In many cases traditionalist type farmers hold the most power in the farming enterprises, refusing to give power to other actors (i.e., tenants, children, neighbours) and essentially creating 'constrained entrepreneurs'. The ageing work force issue appeared to exacerbate this problem, for example as a farmer's son and grandchildren got older, and wanted more authority in the farm business, the

farm owner needs to empower and give them this authority, when this doesn't happen tensions arise.

The theme of power is dominant across much of Weber's (2003) work. In *Economy and Society* he defines 'power as the probability that one actor within a social relationship will be in a position to carry out his own will despite resistance'. The role of power is echoed throughout Josh's case study, despite his entrepreneurial ambitions Josh is constrained by his landlord's own ideals of how the farm should be ran. Power is also routed deeply in amongst the other challenges facing farmers. Succession and working with family were noted as a key challenge for many farmers, farmer's children often spend their lives constantly striving for legitimation in the farming business, wanting to be given more authority to make key business decisions, such as handling finances, buying and selling livestock, engaging in diversification strategies and ultimately gaining more control of the farm. Typically, traditionalist farmers do not want to transfer this power, often leading to conflicts amongst the rest of the farming family. When someone finally does succeed the traditionalist farmer and gains legitimate control over the farming enterprise, they will often be older and less entrepreneurial in nature, as it is noted that EO often declines with age (Liang et al., 2018). Whilst those business minded and entrepreneurially orientated farmers recognise to some extent the power relations within the farming enterprises, taking precursive steps towards a healthy farm succession.

The iron cage metaphor can be used as one lens to observe how some traditionalist and constrained entrepreneurs behave. It shows how some formal (i.e., government restrictions) and informal (i.e., landlord relationships) institutional conditions can prevent farmers from pursuing certain business activities and constrain entrepreneurial behaviour (Chowdhury et al., 2019). Farmers residing inside these cages are often limited in which business strategies they can use, as entrepreneurial strategies may be constrained, alongside if they can leave the iron cage, they might re-



enter another one (Section 8.3.1). Often these types of farmers will use reactive/do nothing farm business strategies and only change when forced to, or when policy measures support change. However, not all farmers appeared to be so cynical of bureaucracy, as shown in the next section introducing the protective cage.

### 8.2.2 The Protective Cage

In this sub-section the 'protective cage' variant, based upon Ritzer's et al. (2018) velvet cage, is applied to the institutional constraints facing upland farmers. Its main distinctive feature is that as opposed to the institutional conditions being repressive and restrictive, as seen in Weber's metaphor, the cage is privileging and protective in nature and favours certain individuals.

All the farmers interviewed regarded themselves as being reliant upon subsidy support, raising concerns over the removal and its impact on their farming businesses. Tenant farmers criticised the benefits of BPS, with one farmer referring to large landowners as "armchair farmers born into a state of luxury." This 'state of luxury' resembles Ritzer's et al. (2018) velvet cage, whereby some farmers have inherited farms from their parents and have been able to run profitable businesses because they own large parcels of land. The challenges associated with CAP subsidy payments, particularly to tenant farmers, are found within the rural studies literature (Ilbery et al., 2007; Maye et al., 2009; Arnott et al., 2019; Gittins et al., 2020), whilst large landowners have profited from the CAP influenced institutional scenario. Metaphorically speaking, these large landowning farmers reside in a velvet cage.

The velvet cage is a product of the institutional conditions created by EU policymakers. Naturally, all policies in some way will favour some and disadvantage others. However, it may be argued that as agricultural, rural and environmental policies change, a new velvet cage might be formed. The DAP is centred around the

idea of “public money for public goods” (Bateman and Balmford, 2018), which incentivises farmers for providing services that the public can benefit from i.e., countryside access, sustainable farming practices and increasing biodiversity. With this shift in policy arguably comes a shift in power: those farmers who are rich in natural capital (Spake et al., 2019) and ecological knowledge should be able to monetise their farming methods and align them with the requirements of the ELMs. Theoretically speaking, this creates a ‘new’ velvet cage.

This change resonates with the classical economic and entrepreneurship theory associated with Schumpeter’s ‘creative destruction’ (Section 3.1) (Schumpeter et al., 1934). Whilst creative destruction is typically associated with product and service innovation, it could equally be applied on a grander scale in the context of the ‘cages’ metaphor. As policies change and new policies are introduced, old ones are destroyed, creating new institutional conditions in which entrepreneurs must navigate. However, with the formation of the new DAP cage, it is expected that many farmers might be unprepared and lack sufficient knowledge to adapt to the changing policy mechanisms, which risks turning the previously velvet cage into an iron one. Some traditionalist farmers might reside inside these velvet cages, protected by the institutional conditions. Those farmers owning large parcels of land have not faced the same realities facing tenant farmers and small-scale farmers, who have been subjected to inflated land prices and an inability to reach economies of scale (Maye et al., 2009). However, as policy changes [traditional] farmers might be pressured to consider new farming strategies, such as environmental strategies to try and enter the new velvet cage or even to do nothing/leave the farm sector entirely. Thus, the Constrained Institutional Context is perhaps shifting.

It is clear then that a changing institutional scenario will lead farmers to pursue different strategic choices to maintain economic sustainability. The creation of new institutional conditions which favour environmental sustainability (i.e., velvet cage)

replacing the BPS system, which favoured landowners, will likely shift the balances of power. The transition away from BPS means that landowners are having power taken away from them, resulting in other actors (such as tenant farmers) being empowered and working under new, hopefully fairer, institutional conditions. It will be interesting to understand how balances of power shift under new agricultural and environmental policies, as actors such as landlords in this thesis were found to hold high levels of power over [constrained] entrepreneurial farmers, preventing rural economic growth.

This section has applied Ritzer's et al. (2018) 'velvet cage' adaptation to the institutional scenario overseeing the English uplands. It has been theorized that the previously protective 'velvet cage' upheld by BPS is now transitioning into an iron cage. Actors within now must formulate strategies to exit this cage, preferably towards the 'new' environmental velvet cage being formed, or they may face increasing restrictions and even business failure. Suppose farmers do not pursue new [entrepreneurial] strategies once the subsidies are removed. In that case, it could be their farm businesses that are 'destroyed' (Schumpeter et al., 1934) in the process to make way for a new wave of environmentally and entrepreneurially orientated farmers which are self-sufficient and detached from BPS support.

### 8.2.3 The Cage is Neutral

In this sub-section, the third alteration of the cage metaphor, 'cage is neutral' based upon George Ritzer's 'rubber cage' is applied to the upland farm sector (Ritzer, 2009). Here, the cage is viewed in a more neutral light, whereby it can be advantageous and disadvantageous to those residing within.

Theoretically speaking, although appearing metallic (iron, steel) in nature, those who choose to closely inspect the bars of this cage realise that they are made of rubber,

allowing those [entrepreneurially orientated] individuals to enter and exit the cage. This variant resembles the entrepreneurial trait-based concept 'Locus of Control' (LoC) identified earlier in the literature review (Lefcourt, 1991; see Section 3.1.2). An external LoC refers to those who view life as predetermined, with constraints being outside of one's control. Whereas, an internal LoC is prominent in individuals who believe constraints are matter of mindsets that can be overcome with enough determination and resources (Lefcourt, 1991). The nature of this cage is relative to how one views it. Those who possess the entrepreneurial skills and competencies to respond and overcome the constraints can do so, whilst those who cannot become constrained by the institutional forces.

Typically, the older generation of farmers (i.e., traditionalists) perceived the bureaucracies in a constraining manner to the farm business, having an external 'locus of control' and employing reactive farm business strategies. In other words, they see the cage as iron. Kallioniemi et al., (2011) notes bureaucracy and administrative duties as a common stress for farmers. While bureaucracy was found to be a constraint to older farmers, the younger and often more entrepreneurially orientated farmers, whilst certainly recognising the institutional constraints, viewed bureaucracies in a different light: as rubber that requires adapting to and can be escaped. For example, some viewed the 'red tape' as essential to modern farming, allowing farmers to produce high quality British beef and lamb products with high levels of animal and environmental standards. The younger farmers generally took the view that many of the traditionalist farmers lacked sufficient skillsets and capabilities to comply with the rules and regulations associated with modern farming, which in turn caused them to feel stressed out and incur financial costs, making it seem like they lived in an iron cage.

Isaac states:

“I think it’s part of the day-to-day life in modern farming really. You just accept it and crack on. Especially for somebody coming into farming from private sector manufacturing, I don’t think it’s too much for farmers. I think it’s more about the education of regulations and educating farmers about why they are important.”

Farmers who view the cage as rubber may be entrepreneurially orientated in nature, using other types of strategies that the traditionalist farmer is less inclined to use, such as diversification or environmental strategies. For example, some of the younger farmers interviewed, whilst voiced their frustrations of having to comply with red tractor accreditation, realised by doing that extra bit of form filling allowed them to sell their products at a higher price than other farmers, and educate the public on the environmental benefits of UK agriculture through a recognised accreditation scheme.

Other scholars have criticised the rigid nature of Weber’s iron cage, terming it a ‘fluid cage’ which is reflective of the cage is neutral adaptation here (Clegg and Baumeler, 2010; Refai and McElwee, 2019). Refai and McElwee (2019) argue a need for scholars to go beyond analysing [refugee] entrepreneurship through Weber’s original metaphor and recognise the fluid nature of the metaphor, whereby inhabitants can see and escape the institutional conditions which constrain entrepreneurial activity. The conceptualisation of the liquid and rubber cage variants allows scholars to look at how individuals (i.e. farmers, refugees etc) can overcome institutional constraints. However, it may be argued that for some actors the institutional constraints may be too strong. As farmers become older, less entrepreneurially orientated and perhaps more burdened by changing institutional bureaucracies, the fluid/rubber bars may harden and solidify into iron-like bars. A once clear and fluid cage, in which entrepreneurially orientated individuals can see the institutional challenges and navigate around them, may undergo a process of ‘solidification,’ turning into a glass ceiling like structure where individuals can see where they want to get to but cannot

penetrate the hardened walls, before over time the glass turns to metal/iron and into a prison-like structure.

This discussion based on varieties of the cage reflects that there are both pros and cons to the institutional conditions and bureaucracies associated with upland farmers. The cages can be relative, a misunderstanding around essential administrative duties and bureaucracies for some farmers can be interpreted as constraints. However, some [entrepreneurial/business minded] farmers might see the need for these bureaucracies, navigating around them and using them to strengthen their businesses.

	Traditionalist Farmer	Entrepreneurial Farmer
Iron Cage	Cost Cutting, Growth by Expansion, Push Diversification	Constrained Entrepreneurs, Bricolage, Innovation
Protective Cage	Do Nothing	Environmental Strategies, pull diversification

Figure 8.2.3 Strategic Choices Matrix

Figure 8.2.3 above contextualizes how the different cages, iron or protective, might result in different types of farmers, traditionalist or entrepreneurial for example, utilising different types of business strategies to respond to the challenges in the sector. This analysis helps us rethink the ideal types created earlier in relation to the different institutional conditions facing farmers. For example, traditionalist farmers operating within an iron cage (i.e., BPS removal, poor profitability) may seek to maintain economic sustainability through cost-cutting and being pushed into pursuing diversification strategies. Those traditionalist farmers operating in a protective cage may do nothing, as they may be protected from the harsh realities facing other farmers. Entrepreneurial farmers might seek to overcome the constraints inside their iron cages by employing entrepreneurial bricolage and utilising innovation (Baker and Nelson, 2005), however, for some the constraints might be too strong, creating constrained farm entrepreneurs. Finally, some farmers might be entrepreneurial and reside in a protective cage, those farmers who are rich in natural capital (Spake et al., 2019) for example, may be pursuing environmental strategies under the ELMs and typically have fewer constraints than those farmers in the iron cages. Indeed, many [traditionalist] upland farmers may need to consider what environmental and public services can be produced through the farm businesses, such as habitat restoration, carbon sequestration, tree planting, sustainable farming practices, educational visits and improving access to the countryside (Choi et al., 2021). Analysing the different institutional scenarios provided insight into the relative challenges facing farmers, aiding to understand the types of business strategies used to respond to the beef and sheep sector challenges.

#### 8.2.4 A Different Perspective on the Cage Metaphor

The prior sub-sections have theorized how different types of farmers can operate under different institutional conditions. This sub-section argues how scholars should not only examine how individuals, business owners and entrepreneurs navigate the constraints of each cage but turns attention to those creating the cages and institutional environments. Those in charge of the cages might be termed different depending upon the cage in question, from the 'puppet masters' in Weber's cynical metaphor, to a fairer like 'warden' figure in the velvet cage adaption, to simply policymakers and decision-makers in the cage is neutral adaptation. The notion of increasing rationalization is also discussed through two case studies, arguing how the removal of 'traditionalist' type farmers could exacerbate some challenges in the sector.

It is evident that the role of subsidies has impacted the way farmers run their businesses. Some appear to have become so comfortable inside their velvet cages to the extent that no business strategies are needed to fulfil the needs of the farming enterprise. While other constrained farm entrepreneurs have been trying hard to break out from their cages, formal and informal institutional processes prevent them from meeting their farm business goals and objectives. Other farmers view the cage in a more neutral light, acknowledging the institutional benefits and drawbacks. However, whether one resides in a luxury velvet cage, a temporary cage or a Stahlhartes Gehäuse, the end result is still the same: one is still held captive in a cage. Whilst research has focused on how individuals experience the so-called iron cage and how entrepreneurs exist within its boundaries (Mann, 2018), this study has sought to understand better the institutional conditions which may constrain [farm] entrepreneurship. Scholars might seek to adopt a different perspective on the iron cage metaphor, looking at the role of those setting the institutional conditions.

The policymakers creating agricultural, rural and environmental policies in alignment with a UK domestic agricultural policy are creating the institutional conditions, with of consideration to those policy influencer groups (i.e., farmers, agricultural trade



bodies, pressure groups etc.). The removal of subsidy payments and increased incentivization for producing environmental services means new cages will be created. The velvet cage protecting wealthy landowners may now become an iron cage, with potentially a new velvet cage being formed, welcoming those farmers who are rich in natural capital. Shifts in power are occurring. However, powerful actors connected to farming enterprises that can constrain entrepreneurial activities should be more closely examined. They can constrain entrepreneurial activities that can generate economic, social and environmental contributions.

Policymakers might seek to examine further the effects of increasing rationalization in the agricultural sector. Rationalization, a dominant theme within Weber's work (Swedberg and Agevall, 2020), is found particularly relevant in relation to this thesis. Weber argued that rationalization and increasing bureaucratic control is a part of modern life which is inescapable. In his work on social action in particular, Weber notes how rational social action is replacing other types of social action, such as traditional social action. In the thesis, it can be seen that those more entrepreneurially orientated farmers tended to run their farm businesses in extremely rational ways, drawing upon their [entrepreneurial] skillsets to minimise business costs and maximise profits. Many of these entrepreneurially orientated and business minded farmers are utilising technological skillsets to collect data and improve the economic performance of the farming enterprise, drawing upon skills and knowledge through leveraging social capital through networking (Arnott et al., 2021). However, in the prior chapter, many of the traditionally oriented farmers possessed non-economic farming goals, resembling Weber's traditional social action above, with Weber's means-end rational social action linking to the 'farmer as a businessperson' 'farmers as entrepreneur's types. The case study below illustrates how traditional social action still exists, and perhaps dominates, in some upland farming enterprises.

## Replacing the Traditionalist Farmer: The Decline of the Small Family Farm.

During summer 2020, a local farmer in a nearby village rang me to help him bring in his hay bales before the forecasted rain. Of course, I obliged to help and took my younger brother with me to assist. Nigel is a retired joiner; he is 70 years old and has bought a farm holding of about 25 hectares where he buys a small number of young bullocks each year before selling them on to a fattening farm. He insists his cows are the finest quality on the hillside.



Photo 20 Nigel's bullocks grazing in a field (author generated)

Working here is very different to working on my farm. It made me see how different farms can operate, even though we are only around five miles apart. The set-up is very different when cutting the grass and bailing the hay or silage on our farm. We have over 100 hectares of land so we require larger machinery, but most of the work can be done by one person. We use larger types of machinery than Nigel's farm, which produces bigger bales in a shorter time scale.



Photo 21 Mowing Season on Our Farm (author generated)





Photo 22 silage bales produced from our machinery in poor weather conditions (author generated)

As our farm is larger than Nigel's and we have almost five times the number of cattle with sheep, economically speaking it is far more efficient to utilise large machinery, as we must shake, bale, wrap and store the hay/silage bales as quickly as possible. We also can make silage, so if the weather is poor over the summer months, fodder can still be produced.

In contrast, Nigel's hay making activities are rather different. Photo 23 shows how Nigel makes his hay bales.



Photo 23 Hay baling on Nigel's farm (author generated)

After receiving a call from an elderly lady (Nigel's mother) with the directions to the field, we set off. We almost never found the place, with the long narrow country roads and heaving summertime traffic. It took five of us to complete the job, which spanned over two weeks.

A vintage McCormick and a square baling machine were used, despite being obsolete in modern farming terms, requiring someone to drive the tractor, others to load the bales and one to stand on top of the moving trailer stack the bales in a safe manner. After all the bales were loaded, everyone climbed up the moving trailer and rode back to the barn for handloading each bale onto the loft. Riding back on top of the bales on the trailer was one of the only times I was able to talk with Nigel

and I distinctly remember him saying, “You don’t see much of this anymore. All the machinery nowadays is getting too big, you wouldn’t even fit one of your tractors in our fields, we’d have to widen our gates.”

After loading the bales in the loft, my throat was dry and itching due to breathing in hay and dust. Nigel’s ninety-year-old mother came out with a steak pie and cans of pop. After chatting with Nigel, he handed all the helpers some cash and we went on our way, awaiting his next call when he would need our help again.

#### Case 8.2.4a

The case study above is illustrative of traditional social action, showing how some farmers are motivated by non-economic and social entrepreneurship goals (representative of the hobbyist farmer type, see section 8.1.4). It shows how even though this method of hay production is not necessarily the most rational, and certainly not the most cost-effective way of doing business, it does have certain social contributions. Nigel uses labour in the local rural environment, he is not socially isolated working alone, but working in the field with fellow locals. It is a pleasant site to tourists, enjoying the freshly cut hay meadows, somewhat representative of the ‘rural idyll’ (Bell, 2006). It is a social interaction where farmers enjoyably work together. Nigel is not disconnected from his work, certainly not the “specialist without spirit, or a sensualist without heart” Weber writes of in the Protestant Ethic (Weber, 2003). It is evident that traditional social action still prevails amongst the traditionalist type farmers, with rationality being more prominent amongst the entrepreneurial and business-minded farmers. Speaking from personal experience, undertaking traditional farming activities (like haymaking on Nigel’s farm) is far more enjoyable than working alone all summer.

However, I do feel this is a rare sight nowadays in modern farming, as farmers become more rational-minded and engage in creating process efficiencies reducing labour forces, it then becomes somewhat irrational for a farmer to do more traditionally

orientated activities, despite their clear social and environmental benefits. As UK policies pressure farmers to become more business and entrepreneurially orientated, traditionalist farmers may be in the decline. Whilst this may improve the economic sustainability of upland farming enterprises, a loss of the social contributions associated with the small family hill farm may also be inevitable. Policymakers should perhaps consider the importance of some farming activities beyond the economic factors, helping to promote farmers to consider non-economic and social economic goals which contribute to solving social and environmental problems.

From the case study above, it is evident that small farms offer immense contributions to the rural environment. The decline of the small family farm in line with increasing rationalisation may result in changes to the rural, such as traditional farming practices, which although might not make economic sense, have a cultural importance and contribute to a romantic and 'idyllic view' of the countryside (Mingay, 2017). The case study below highlights further the importance of small family hill farming.



## Does Size Matter? A Smallholding with Big Contributions Bridging the Rural-Urban Divide

I remember visiting this smallholding one Sunday morning with my family. I had been following them on Facebook. I saw a post on Facebook that read ‘visit us on the first Sunday every month on our farm, we have opened up our own farm shop on our smallholding, come from between 10am and 2pm, free coffee for all’. Of course, I jumped at the opportunity and went.



Photo 24 Stoodley farm visit (author generated)

Upon arriving, I noticed the farm was a heavily diversified unit. It was very small in size, less than 10 acres I would say. Yet, they had a flock of Jacobs sheep (what is



considered a rare breed), some highland cattle, pigs, ducks and turkeys. Whilst the farm was small in nature, it appeared to be organised in a highly efficient manner, with every inch of the land being used; fields were divided up to house the various livestock, making use of both pasture and woodland. I entered the large barn and was greeted by a female farmer, Sarah, her husband Mark and her friend Kelly.

Sarah was very chatty and there was a sense of a warm welcoming. Quite different to the 'traditionalist' and stereotyped farmers one might imagine shouting 'get off my land'. Sarah chatted with me about when she decided to enter farming, why she chose this particular smallholding and told me about how she loves interacting with the public.

Inside the barn was a concrete floor, several tables were positioned in a U shape with plastic baskets on filled with various products. Behind Sarah were various meat processing machines (see photo 25 below) and ovens to create their produce. I bought a number of products off her and I went on my way. After leaving Sarah, I walked around the smallholding, watching the urban visitors arrive, gaze at the farm, and learn how their food is produced. Indeed, Sarah had brought the urban to the rural.



Photo 25 Meat processing equipment

I later saw Sarah again at an outdoor market in a local town. This time, the setting was completely different. Various products were created from the diversified portfolio of livestock kept on her smallholding. From savoury tartlets, jams, chutneys, breads to selling pork casseroles, highland cattle burgers and even half and whole lamb cuts. Instead of urban visitors coming to the farm, Sarah had brought the rural to the urban.



Photo 26—Selling produce on the outdoor market (author generated)

It is apparent that Sarah farm is not like a traditional upland farm. She only has a small amount of land but that is all she needs to run her diversified business. The diversified nature of her business means it is very public orientated, it centres around showing the urban consumer how their produce is made.

Whilst there are obvious improvements which can be made to the farm enterprise, such as improving the presentation and packaging of products, alongside improving marketing strategies, there was a sense of connection and integration of the rural-urban in this business. Consumers wanted to learn more about farm practices, which Sarah provided on her farm open days. At the same time, Sarah wanted to bring her rurally produced products to urban environments to attract more customers.

#### Case 8.2.4b

Remarkably, this case study highlights the immense social contributions that smallholdings have. Worryingly however, these smallholdings are in decline, as was

discussed in Nigel's case story highlighting the growing problem of the 'decline of the small family hill farm'. The case study shows how one entrepreneurially orientated farmer operates across different spatial contexts. Understanding spatial context helps researchers to understand not only the material dimensions in which farmers operate within (Müller and Korsgaard, 2018), such as geographic location and topographic make-up, but also the socially constructed meanings of place which in itself can be both a facilitator or constraint to the farm business.

Müller and Korsgaard (2018) notes the importance of 'local embeddedness' in attempting to understand the spatial contexts in which rural entrepreneurs operate within, suggesting that entrepreneurs seek to utilise and exploit local resources before attempting to find new resources through 'nonlocal connections'. In the case above, Sarah and presumably other farm entrepreneurs situate their farm business both within local (i.e. direct selling from her farm) and non-local (i.e. direct selling in non-local towns/online) environments to sustain profitability. Through effective networking, Sarah had managed to become embedded both in local and further afield contexts, it was evident Sarah valued networking and acquiring social capital to help market and grow her business (Arnott et al., 2021).

Despite being constrained by farm size, farmers like Sarah display high levels of entrepreneurial bricolage (Garud and Karnøe, 2003). While farming strategies such as growth by land acquisition or increasing stocking density (McElwee and Smith, 2013) cannot be pursued, smaller farmers often turn to more entrepreneurial strategies, such as engaging in direct selling or selecting a differentiated livestock type (Photo 5). The trend in Europe suggests smaller farms are declining and being replaced by 'assumingly' larger and profitable farms. Policymakers might look to create institutional conditions which support smaller sized farms which provide public goods. As while larger more commercially focused farms indeed provide large quantities of commercial produce (i.e, beef and lamb), smaller sized farms arguably

do more for bridging the divide between the rural and urban, interacting with the actors across different 'spatial contexts' beyond the farm-gate and offer impressive economic, social and environmental contributions (Muller and Korsgaard, 2018).

It is apparent then that policymakers create various institutional scenarios which constrain certain types of farmers in various ways. Three types of cages have been created, showing how they can be interpreted in positive, neutral or negative manners. At present, larger landowners have been protected in a 'velvet cage', with smaller-scale farmers being constrained (i.e, lack of subsidies) and have been required to respond entrepreneurially (i.e., bricolage) in order to sustain farm competitiveness. With policy change, this velvet cage is transforming into an 'iron', with farm subsidies being removed and a new velvet cage being formed rewarding farmers pursuing environmentally orientated strategies, favouring those farmers rich in natural capital (Spake et al., 2020). The cages are, therefore, both enabling and constraining of farm entrepreneurship. Finally, the increasing rationalization and replacement of traditionalist farmers with entrepreneurial farmers might raise some social constraints. These discussions then, therefore, raise several important policy considerations. These policy implications are discussed in their own section (Section 9.3) in the next chapter.

## 8.5 Chapter Summary

In summary, this chapter has built upon the empirical findings presented in the prior chapter, discussing the theoretical contributions of this work. The variants of the iron cages have been applied and adapted to illustrate the formal and informal institutional conditions, which can be both facilitators and constraints to effective farm entrepreneurship. The following chapter concludes with a discussion of how the

research questions have been met and the thesis's implications for academia, policy, and practice.

## Chapter Nine: Conclusions and Recommendations



### 9.0 Introduction

This chapter aims to outline the main contributions of the thesis, reflect on its limitations, and discuss potential areas for future research. This chapter is structured as follows. First, it is argued how the sub-research questions and objectives identified in the literature review have been met, followed by a discussion of the overarching research question (Section 9.1). Second, the academic, practice and policy-based implications which have arisen from this research are presented and discussed (Section 9.2). Third, the limitations of this work are discussed alongside areas of future research which rural scholars can develop (Section 9.3), before concluding with some final thoughts (Section 9.4).

### 9.1 Achieving the research aims and objectives

Two sub-research questions and four objectives were created to help answer the overarching research question: *‘What strategies are English upland farmers using to respond to the realities in the beef and sheep sector?’*

RQ1 explored the extent to which English upland farmers are using entrepreneurial strategies to respond to the realities in the beef and sheep sector. It was underpinned by two research objectives. The first objective sought to conceptualise upland farmers as entrepreneurs and strategists to understand the nature of farm business strategies used to respond to the socio-political challenges in the sector. To aid this conceptualisation, the literature around general entrepreneurship, rural entrepreneurship, farm entrepreneurship and strategic entrepreneurship in farming contexts was reviewed. Through this critical review, the notion of ‘farmers as entrepreneurs’ was critically discussed, allowing relevant theories, themes and concepts to inform the analysis of entrepreneurship in upland farming businesses. The second objective sought to employ *verstehen* to understand the realities and lived experiences impacting farmers and their farm businesses. The subjective experiences of farmers were explored by using a novel multi-methods qualitative approach. Farmer worldviews were explored through a variety of data collection techniques, from using more formal approaches, such as semi-structured interviews, to less formal techniques which drew upon my own positionality by using conversations and photographs through ethnographic immersion to capture the ‘present realities’ facing farmers (Maye et al., 2018).

RQ2 investigated the challenges facing English upland beef and sheep farmers, understanding the factors that are constraining of entrepreneurial activity. This research question was underpinned with two further research objectives. Research objective three applied Max Weber’s metaphor of the ‘iron cage’ to investigate the concept of ‘constrained entrepreneurship’ in the context of upland farming. Research objective four examined potential areas in which upland farmers may require additional support in managing the constraints facing their farm businesses. These support mechanisms are discussed in greater depth in the policy implications section of this chapter. Various personal, political and economic, social, environmental and COVID-19 factors were found to be constraining to effective farm entrepreneurship.



Policy orientated towards alleviating some of the constraints identified might encourage more farmers to pursue entrepreneurial business strategies, improving the economic performances of their businesses and strengthening rural resilience.

In terms of the strategies farmers are using to respond to the realities in the beef and sheep sector, it was found that some farmers use entrepreneurial strategies to respond to the industry constraints, though not all farmers could be considered entrepreneurs. This has been demonstrated through the creation of various ideal types, showing how farmers use a variety of strategic choices to respond to the realities in the sector (Section 8.2.3). Seven ideal types of farmers were created with accompanying types of farm business strategies, providing a nuanced understanding into how upland farmers are managing their farm businesses in response to the socio-political challenges in the sector. This thesis has built on existing work which has sought to conceptualise 'farmers as entrepreneurs' (McElwee, 2006). This is done through applying the entrepreneurship theories, themes and concepts identified in chapter three to the context of English upland farmers. This thesis moves the conceptualisation beyond analysing 'farmers as entrepreneurs' (a growing body of research in the farm entrepreneurship literature), but also brings in discussions around strategic management, conceptualising farmers as strategic entrepreneurs in their responses to the adverse market challenges.

#### *Upland farmers as strategic entrepreneurs*

This robust analysis of farmers and their farm businesses has been informed through the FSF, highlighting great heterogeneity in the sector. Indeed, some upland farmers possessed many of the trait-based (Carland et al., 1998) characteristics of an entrepreneur, having an aptitude to take risks, utilise innovation and remaining 'entrepreneurially alert' in pursuing opportunities (Kirzner, 1979). It was shown that

young farmers particularly were entrepreneurially orientated in nature, sometimes having the ability to convince older and more traditionalist type farmers to pursue entrepreneurial strategies. Outsider experience was also found to be a prominent factor in farmers pursuing entrepreneurial activities, with those farmers who came from non-farming backgrounds often utilising entrepreneurial skillsets and innovative thinking in the commercial activities, such as by incorporating practices such as rotational grazing. Small scale farmers too were found to demonstrate high levels of entrepreneurial skillsets and strategic thinking capabilities, employing 'entrepreneurial bricolage' to overcome the constraints relating to farm size (Garud and Karnøe, 2003). Moreover, it was found that many entrepreneurially orientated farmers also operated across different spatial contexts (Müller and Korsgaard's, 2018), making use of both local and non-local markets and challenging the phenomena of the rural-urban divide noted in the literature (Rizov and Walsh, 2011). Thus, a key finding here is that upland farmers should not be treated as a homogeneous group, rather English upland farming consists of great heterogeneity.

Some upland farmers possessed entrepreneurial capabilities and wanted to pursue entrepreneurial business strategies to respond to the institutional challenges, however certain factors constrained them. Landlord and tenant relationships, government restrictions and farmer skillsets were identified as key constraints to farm entrepreneurship. Some of these challenges could be overcome with entrepreneurial mindsets, symbolic of the cage is neutral perspective (Ritzer, 2011: Section 8.2.3). However, other constraints such as farm location and lack of access to essential rural and urban resources, were harder to overcome, creating constrained entrepreneurs residing in 'iron' cages (Section 8.2.1). Indeed, this analysis of farmers and their strategies through the cage perspectives provided a nuanced understanding into how upland farmer [entrepreneurs] respond to the industry's socio-political challenges.

In some cases, the institutional conditions created a protective environment in which some farmers spent little time considering the future of the farming business. These were often traditionalist type farmers who are reactive in nature and only consider the long-term goals of the farming enterprise when major changes to institutional conditions occur, such as BPS removal. Many traditionalist farmers did not typically regard themselves as having any formal business strategies. This might not be surprising to some as farms may be treated as microbusinesses and owners of microbusinesses often do not have formal business strategies (Greenbank, 2001). However, it may be argued that treating farms as microbusinesses is of little value, mainly because farms are distinctive in comparison to traditional microbusinesses and any analysis of farm businesses, as demonstrated through the FSF, should feature the distinctive characteristics associated with agricultural businesses. Farmers often run multimillion pound enterprises when taking into consideration the value of assets, they produce food and other agricultural commodities from taxpayers, and many do this with no/little strategic plans in place. However, some of the other types of farmers did possess high levels of strategic thinking capabilities, particularly those more entrepreneurially orientated farmers, who had formal strategies, business plans and invested in future proofing their businesses.

Diversification was found to be a common strategy used by those more entrepreneurially orientated farmers (Maye and Ilbery, 2009; Morris et al., 2017; Lokier et al., 2021). Whilst in line with prior research - many of the entrepreneurial farmers did indeed diversify - it can be argued that entrepreneurship can manifest within the core competencies of the business. For example, some farmers were being innovative in pursuing new production methods, such as rotational grazing or adopting precision farming technologies, being proactive ahead of the subsidy removal. Moreover, one agricultural stakeholder interviewed stressed the importance of 'diversification not being a silver bullet for farmers', suggesting that different levels of skillsets, competencies and resources are required to diversify successfully

(Bosworth and McElwee, 2010). So, whilst farmers can indeed pursue diversification strategies to maintain economic sustainability of the farming business, it is only one strategic choice that makes up the phenomena of farm entrepreneurship. Entrepreneurial skillsets and strategic thinking capabilities were found to play an important role in helping farmers prepare for changes to these institutional conditions.

Indeed, those farmers who are already pursuing environmental initiatives are likely to be in a sound position following the transition to ELMs, whilst those farmers who live within the velvet subsidised cage may find it difficult to sustain farm business income, resulting in potentially some farmers choosing to leave the sector and take the paid lump sum exits (Defra, 2021). However, if more rationally and business minded farmers do replace the traditionalist type farmers, then there could be substantial socio-cultural changes to the rural environment as we know it. While not running the most economically sustainable farming enterprises, traditionalist and hobbyist/part-time farmers often undertake certain farming activities which are symbolic of a romanticized rural idyll (Mingay, 2017). The removal of these traditional activities through increasing rationalization within the sector could cause changes to the rural appearance and create more social constraints, such as reducing farm labour and increasing rural isolation in favour of productivity gains. Thus, traditional social action is important in rural areas.

Whilst in the literature farmers have been conceptualised as entrepreneurs (McElwee, 2006c), no authors have attempted to conceptualise farmers as 'strategic entrepreneurs.' This appears odd as the disciplines of entrepreneurship and strategic management have overlapping features, to the extent where a world leading journal (Journal of Strategic Entrepreneurship) recognises the need to combine both entrepreneurship and strategy theories, themes and concepts. A strategist is, by definition, someone who possesses certain strategic thinking capabilities which allows

oneself to have an 'ability to look up from the short term and the trivial to view the long term and the essential, to address causes rather than symptoms, to see woods rather than trees'. (Freedman, 2015:9). By this definition, those farmers who are able to visualise and set long-term goals for the farming enterprise, can be conceptualised as strategists. Clearly those more entrepreneurially orientated farmers do possess STC and create strategies, however, a large part of the farming sector is dominated by traditionalist farmers who 'lack an ability to look up from the short term.' Nonetheless, the replacement of these farmers with more rationale and business [entrepreneurial] minded one's (via the lump sum scheme) might result in changes to the rural environment as we know it.

In trying to answer the overarching research questions, several key findings emerged. A nuanced understanding of the different types of farmers, farms and farm business strategies was unearthed. The adapted FSF and a focus on the different units of analysis to study farmers as a social group highlighted the level of heterogeneity which exists amongst farmers. This heterogeneity is shown through the creation of the various farmer ideal types. An overview of the constraints and challenges facing farmers were identified, understanding from the perspective of farmers how these challenges impact them in their daily lives. These constraints are contextualized and theorised within the different cage adaptations, going beyond the level of understanding around these challenges presented in chapter 2. Fitz-Koch et al. (2017) identified three areas of further research in agricultural entrepreneurship which were explored in the context of this thesis: Entrepreneurial Identity, Family Entrepreneurship and Institutional Entrepreneurship. The identity farmers constructed around themselves as a farmer and the farm business image was found to be both a facilitator and constraint to farm entrepreneurship (Section 8.2.2). The role of family was especially important, with members of the farming family bringing entrepreneurial thinking and innovation to the farm business (If accepted by farm decision-makers) (Section 3.2.2). Finally, institutional entrepreneurship aligned well

with the study's theoretical underpinning, showing the formal and informal institutional constraints which are impacting the realities facing farmers within the sector (Section 8.2).

In summary, a variety of strategies are used to respond to the realities facing farmers. The creation of the farmer typologies helps showcase these strategic choices used by farmers. Few research has highlighted the heterogeneity which exists amongst English upland farmers. This research has provided insight into the entrepreneurial and strategic management practices occurring in the context of upland farm businesses. The research contributions are now summarised.

## 9.2 Research Contributions

The main field of research that this thesis contributes to is the rural/farm entrepreneurship literature. However, due to the inter-disciplinary nature of this research, there is potential to contribute to contemporary debates in other research fields (Section 3.0). In addition to drawing upon relevant concepts, theories and themes from the area of entrepreneurship research, other fields such as strategic management and rural sociology are reviewed (Weber, 2003). The audience of this research extends beyond the relatively niche field of rural entrepreneurship: it will also be of interest to rural sociologists, geographers and those interested in food policy. In the following sub-sections, the research contributions are broken down into three types: academic, practice and policy based.

### 9.2.1 Academic Contributions

This thesis has made several empirical, theoretical, and methodological contributions. These contributions have led to a further contextualized understanding of conceptualising farmers as [strategic] entrepreneurs. The academic contributions are now discussed.

#### *Empirical Contributions*

Earlier in the literature review, it was found that agricultural contexts are significantly under-researched when compared with main-stream entrepreneurship, which is largely concerned with understanding practices and processes in urban entrepreneurship (Dias et al., 2019). Specifically, the upland farm sector is one context which has seen little attention. Whilst there have been some entrepreneurship studies situated within upland farming contexts, such as Morris et al. (2017) who looked at soft technology adoption on upland farms, few studies seek to specifically explore how entrepreneurship and strategic management practices manifest in upland farm enterprises. This is of particular importance given the current changing agricultural policy situation. Throughout this thesis, the complicated phenomenon of entrepreneurship has been explored in the context of upland farmers, drawing upon the trait-based characteristics (Carland et al., 1998) and the behavioural (Gartner, 1988) approaches to understand upland farmers as entrepreneurs. Whilst some prior research has attempted to conceptualise 'farmers as entrepreneurs' (McElwee, 2006a), it has generally ignored the sub-contexts occurring within the agricultural sector. The focus of scholars has been on farmers generally as a homogeneous social group, instead of understanding entrepreneurship and business management practices in specific farming sub-contexts (i.e., upland, lowland, dairy, pig, cereal), scholars have routinely grouped all types of farmers under one scope of analysis. The role of sub-contexts has been somewhat ignored. Focusing on one specific farmer group has

allowed a deeper level analysis into how entrepreneurship and strategic management practices manifest in upland businesses.

Moreover, this research has contributed by integrating the notion of 'strategic entrepreneurship' into the existing conceptualisation of 'farmers as entrepreneurs' in the rural entrepreneurship literature (McElwee, 2006a). Various farmer and farm business strategy typologies have been created which reflect the heterogenic nature of how upland farmers are responding to the challenges facing them and their farm businesses. It was shown through an analysis of the empirical data that great heterogeneity exists across English upland farm businesses. Several different types of farmers were identified, all of which orchestrate their farm business practices in different manners. This extends existing research where typologies have been used to discuss how farmers manage their business (McElwee, 2008a; McElwee and Bosworth, 2010; Morris et al., 2017). The exploration of challenges through the typology and case study creations has allowed me to capture the contemporary views of English upland farmers during a pivotal time of upcoming policy change. Some prior research has explored various scenarios where funding for upland farmers might be reduced (Maye et al., 2009; Reed et al., 2009). However, these existing studies are quickly becoming outdated as we transition away from CAP subsidised support and enter payments based on the production of public goods, a change in the system which many farmers might be unprepared for. This research adds to this area of providing insight into the 'present realities' of farmers (Maye et al., 2018) regarding the removal of subsidy payments and a transition to environmental payments under ELMs.

Many challenges and constraints were found to be impacting English upland farmers, from personal farm constraints to the macro-micro challenges associated with the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. To the best of my knowledge, this research is the first farm entrepreneurship study to explicitly explore the challenges facing English upland farmers. Specifically, this study contributes to the emerging crisis



management theme of research in the entrepreneurship literature, showing how upland farm businesses have responded [via entrepreneurial means] to COVID-19 influenced challenges (Phillipson et al., 2020). Whilst some of the more entrepreneurially orientated farmers were able to respond to an increased demand due to supermarket stockouts, it remains to be seen how farmers can retain this increased demand in a 'post-covid world'.

### *Theoretical Contributions*

A theoretical contribution has also been made by creating the upland farmer segmentation framework. It was shown in the conceptual framework chapter that existing strategy frameworks, such as Porter's generic strategies and the Ansoff Matrix, cannot be used to analyse farming businesses. Rather a specific framework should be designed. McElwee's (2004) and (2012) farmer segmentation framework was identified as being effective in understanding the shared characteristics amongst different farming businesses. The upland segmentation framework was adapted and simplified to be used as an exploratory device which can be used when interviewing and analysing farmer responses, gaining insight into the personal characteristics of farmers, farm businesses characteristics and the business activities and processes of the farm. Other rural research scholars may want to consider using the adapted FSF in their research.

Suess-Reyes and Fuetsch (2016) note a lack of strong theoretical underpinning within the context of rural studies research, with only nine papers in their literature review explicitly citing a theoretical base. In this thesis's theoretical chapter, Weber's metaphor of the 'iron cage' was noted as an appropriate theoretical lens to explore De Bruin's concept of 'constrained entrepreneurship', supporting this work with a sound theoretical underpinning. It was found that the use of Weber's work, namely the iron cage metaphor, has not been applied as a theoretical lens to understand farm

entrepreneurship within an upland farming context. The cage metaphor was discussed in relation to the empirical findings. For some farmers, bureaucracy was a key challenge to how they run their farm businesses, particularly in the agricultural environmental schemes. Moreover, some farmers faced personal factors such as unfavourable landlord relationships, which constrained them. In contrast, other farmers were in favour of much of the bureaucracy in the agricultural sector, arguing it is a requirement as it allows UK agriculture to conform to high environmental and animal welfare standards. This nuanced understanding of contextualizing the different cage variants (Section 8.2) promoted an understanding into how institutional conditions influenced strategic choices and behaviours of farmers. Therefore, a theoretical contribution to the farm entrepreneurship/rural sociology literature has been made.

### *Methodological Contributions*

This thesis makes a methodological contribution to the farm entrepreneurship literature by utilising an 'industry insider' approach. It is carried out by someone from within the upland farming community. Few studies reflect on the methodological processes involved in interviewing farmers, with even fewer reflecting on adopting an industry insider positionality. McElwee (2008b) and Kuehne (2016) are some of the very few scholars who discuss some of the methodological implications of interviewing farmers. I extend these debates by arguing the need for more 'industry insider' driven farm entrepreneurship research to bridge the gap between academic theory and practice. This industry insider approach allowed me to collect rich qualitative data which someone from an 'outsider' position would have had difficulty attaining due to issues of access and trust. This methodological contribution extends existing debates around conducting qualitative research with and about farmers. Kuehne (2016) highlights the insider/outsider debate, however, does not acknowledge the concept of involvement and detachment (Lever and Powell, 2017), there are times

within the research process that even insiders must become detached. Throughout this research I have found that making my insider status clear from the beginning allows me to quickly build trust with farmers and other agricultural stakeholders, allowing me to overcome data access issues.

There is a lack of interpretative/constructionist driven research in the farm entrepreneurship literature, with most studies adopting quantitative research designs (McElwee, 2008a). Whilst some studies claim to have phenomenological and ethnographic designs, often scholars fail to engage in a methodological discussion as to why qualitative research designs can unearth new knowledge in the area of farm entrepreneurship research (Smith et al., 2020). I add to this in the thesis by engaging in a deep discussion around the methodological processes involved in conducting qualitative research in farming contexts. Maye et al. (2018) argue that future farm-based research should attempt to explore ‘the realities’ and ‘lived experiences’ of rural actors. This is precisely what this thesis does but it does so in a deeper way than in other work, such as Maye’s (2018) work which used secondary sources to explore [cereal] farmer worldviews. In contrast, I use primary data collection methods whilst documenting my own immersion within the study. The multi-methods approach allows me in a rigorous manner to explore the realities facing farmers, not just through conducting one-hour semi-structured interviews, but through conversations with farmers when they are working, taking photos of what they experience and drawing on my own farming background to answer the research question.

Moreover, the use of Weberian concepts has been embedded in the thesis’s methodological design. Underpinning an interpretative/constructionist perspective with Weber’s *verstehen*, I was concerned with understanding the lived experiences of upland farmers and entering farmer worldviews through a relativist ontology, symbolised in the methodology chapter by the artist Escher’s work. Alongside this, Weber advocated research following a methodological individualist approach i.e.,

focusing on the only thing that is 'real' within social science research, humans. This has been reflected in my methodology by having it grounded in empiricism.

Overall, multiple contributions have been made as a result of this thesis, from the conceptual development of the FSF and incorporation of Weberian influenced ideal types, to the empirical data gathered which proposes implications for those working in practice.

### 9.2.2 Implications for Practice

One of the main criticisms of academic management literature, in general, is the lack of studies that apply management theory to practical settings (Reed, 2009). Academia has widely been criticised for this, with those actors outside of scholarly life viewing academia as an 'ivory tower' with little real-world importance (Shapin, 2012). This research has been methodologically grounded in empiricism, concerned with understanding the lived experiences of farmers while framing it in relation to existing theoretical debates from the domains of entrepreneurship, strategy, and sociology. In this theoretical and practical context, this thesis has several significant implications for the practitioners of focus: [upland] farmers and agricultural stakeholders.

The findings capture the lived experiences of English upland farmers during a time of political and economic uncertainty: the build-up to leaving the EU common agricultural policy. This thesis will thus be of use to farmers like those interviewed in the study who are interested in seeing the relative challenges within the sector, and in understanding how fellow farmers are responding to these challenges through the operationalisation of strategic and entrepreneurial thinking in the context of farm business. It may aid farmers in seeing the various constraints which could impact them and their businesses one day, and provide them with ideas about how to respond via entrepreneurial means to said challenges.

Moreover, this research has not been carried out in isolation by one particular agricultural trade body. Industry research is rarely conducted outside of individual organisations and membership bases. For example, the NFU often carry out research on their members, but their members do not represent all types of farmers. Only those which pay membership fees are included in their research. In addition, this research has engaged in a multi-stakeholder approach to understand the challenges facing farmers, interviewing upland farmers and senior members from major agricultural trade body organisations who work with upland farmers and understand the challenges impacting farmers beyond the farm gate. Thus, the findings will be useful for various actors working within the beef and sheep sector: farmers, NFU, AHDB, National Sheep Association *inter alia*.

Finally, alongside work being published in the form of academic journal articles, I want to make this research more accessible to those working in practice-orientated roles. I will make a short, summarised version of this thesis to disseminate to those interested, so those working in practice can read the key findings. Moreover, I will disseminate this research summary in paper format to the interviewees and over email to the members of the agricultural trade bodies that took part. Two research pieces have already arisen from work carried out over my doctoral studies published in RuSource and The Conversation which appeal to practitioners and wider audiences (See Gittins, 2020b; See Gittins, 2021c).

### 9.2.3 Policy Implications

As upland farmers adapt to the new support measures outlined by UK government during the gradual removal of BPS and transition to ELMs, while also working to recover from the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, it is evident that entrepreneurs

will play a significant role in revitalising the [rural] economy. The role of farm entrepreneurs should not be ignored from this recovery strategy. These policy implications are now discussed.

### *Transitioning to ELMs*

This research has captured the contemporary views of farmers in regard to upcoming agricultural policy change. Upland farmers are clearly concerned with the economic impact and uncertainties associated with a DAP and payment through the proposed ELMs schemes. By 2024 farmers will receive 50% of their BPS entitlements and a failure to find suitable income streams, such as acceptance of agri-environmental schemes, may result in the collapse of many farming businesses. For farmers to future proof their businesses, they must think strategically about how they will respond to these challenges. Unfortunately, STC are not possessed by *all* farmers.

Indeed, many farmers criticised existing agri-environmental schemes, prompting them to be pessimistic in relation to ELMs. Entry and compliance with environmental schemes were regarded as unnecessarily bureaucratic and restrictive, Policymakers should consider either reducing unnecessary bureaucracies and making them more farmer friendly, or educating farmers on why these stringent regulations are needed. Some farmers were also concerned over the impact ELMs would have to farm labour and mental health, whilst improving process efficiencies could help farmers remain economically sustainable following subsidy reduction/withdrawal, this could have negative social considerations on farm labour. A policy brief with easy-to-read infographics is an anticipated outcome building on this thesis, showing farmer concerns over existing and proposed policy decisions. Such a document will be undoubtedly useful for policymakers.

### *Lump-Sum Exit Scheme*

The findings of this research link to Defra's policy discussions around lump-sum exit payments (Defra, 2021). Farmers are to be given their remaining BPS entitlements early to free up agricultural land, attract new entrants, and encourage entrepreneurship and innovative thinking to the rural economies. This mechanism could increase rationalisation in the UK's agricultural sector, phasing out traditionalist type farmers with more entrepreneurially orientated and business minded farmers. However, doing this could also result in a loss of traditional social action (Weber, 2000), and potentially cause more social problems, such as reducing farm labour as productivity gains are achieved. Intense scrutiny should be given to this policy-change, specifically regarding farm succession-planning, as some farmers may not retire if it means that the farm estate cannot be transferred to members of the farming family. Indeed, special attention should be given to family entrepreneurship, as often entrepreneurial capabilities exist within the farming family but might be constrained by more traditionalist farmers in the farming business who hold seniority.

### *COVID-19 Recovery Strategy*

Rural areas have seen increasing interest due to the COVID-19 pandemic, with more workers migrating to rural areas to engage in the work from home culture. An increasing body of research is now concerned with understanding entrepreneurial responses to the COVID-19 implications within various sectors (Ratten, 2020; Ketchen and Craighead, 2020; Thukral, 2021). Existing challenges have become more prominent, such as lack of broadband and phone signal for many farmers. An important question remains in regard to rural policymaking: will rural areas play a significant role in the COVID-19 recovery strategy? And if so, what will be the role of farm entrepreneurs? Or perhaps, will rural areas lag behind their urban counterparts and simply be a support mechanism to urban areas, increasing the rural-urban divide?

Whatever the result, it is clear that many farmers were able to respond in entrepreneurial ways during the COVID-19. However, more policy support measures should be put in place to ensure farmers can capture a part of this demand and participate in the post-pandemic recovery.

### *Developing the Rural Economies*

It is evident from the findings that farm entrepreneurs have an embedded role within the local rural and further afield urban areas, spanning across different spatial contexts (Müller and Korsgaard, 2018). Rural infrastructure is lacking all across the English uplands. Farm diversification activities depend on the local rural environment, so the closure of small abattoirs and auction markets constrains farmers who want to be proactive and engage in entrepreneurial ventures. Relationships between farmers and abattoirs were found in one case to be a prominent factor in diversifying the farm business through a direct selling venture. More needs to be done to support the other rural actors who play a supporting role in encouraging farm entrepreneurship. It has been shown that farm entrepreneurs do not operate in isolation. In order to be successful, they need a thriving rural economy that allows them to access the resources they need to pursue their business strategies.

Moreover, the role of small family farms (i.e., less than 10 hectares) should not be ignored by policymakers, as it was found that many of these types of farms within the study generate greater levels of social, cultural and environmental benefits than many of the larger sized farms. Whilst increasing the number of entrepreneurially and business minded farmers might be positive economically speaking for the economy, in alignment with the lump sum payment exit schemes (Defra, 2021), there may be a decline in the social and environmental contributions associated with a decline in the small family farm. Institutional support targeted at farm businesses would help build resilience in the face of ongoing changes facing upland farmers (and farmers



elsewhere). Similar outcomes would emerge from support promoting sustainability in rural economies and supplying farmers with the vital rural resources and infrastructure they need to run profitable farming businesses. Indeed, social capital was a key concept that allowed farmers to gain access to new resources, allowing farmers to overcome constraints, such as combatting rural isolation (Sharp, 2003; Arnott, Chadwick, Wynne-Jones, et al., 2021). It might be useful for policymakers to develop rural infrastructure further and strengthen linkages between rural and urban environments to help open up new markets and opportunities for farmers.

Farmer skillsets were also identified as a constraint in farming businesses, those farmers who lacked sufficient skillsets in particular viewed bureaucracy and regulations in a cynical light. Developing the entrepreneurial skillsets of farmers would allow farmers to apply for subsidy and grant applications without the need of having to employ land agents to deal with paperwork. Mike's case study (Section 8.2.1) showed the struggles associated with older aged farmers in dealing with legislative requirements. However, perhaps some things are unnecessarily bureaucratic, and government might seek to streamline and reduce these to the ageing workforce in the UK's agricultural sector. Perhaps the topic of developing the entrepreneurial skillsets of farmers (McElwee, 2006) needs to be revisited in relation to a post-covid, Brexit Britain and digitalised rural economy.

### 9.3 Limitations and Further Research

This section discusses some limitations of the thesis and suggests some potential areas of future research which I or other scholars might seek to pursue. I discuss my insider positionality, data collection and generalisability, the study's theoretical underpinning and suggest how some quantitative work might follow from this work.

One might criticise my 'industry insider' positionality, arguing that I am too close to the research phenomenon. Involvement and detachment throughout the process have helped me distance myself and report the findings. However, this research could have been carried out by an 'industry outsider' and attempted to document the methodological process and sense-making of interviewing farmers. Scholars engaging in reflexivity around outsider positionalities in conducting research with and about farmers could make a methodological contribution to the literature.

Different data collection methods could have been used to capture the realities and lived experiences facing farmers. However, with the ongoing pandemic, I was limited to the methods I used, so I had to turn heavily to my insider positionality, making use of a research diary, conversations whilst working, alongside switching to phone interviews. Future research could collect further primary data through visiting various farm and observing farmers in practice. The research diary has been such an essential tool in helping me engage in reflexivity throughout, however I think there is further potential to use qualitative research diaries to collect data on farming practices. Over 90% of farms are occupied by either one person or one farming family (Lowder, 2016) and it was found that many traditionalist type farmers do not openly talk about farm succession, diaries might prove an integral link in the transferring of farm knowledge through the succession process. This qualitative research tool might be something to explore further in relation to entrepreneurship and strategic management practices in farming businesses.

Whilst much of the interview is generalisable to farmers outside of England, this same piece of research could have included a larger sample size, exploring the realities of farmers from the devolved nations of Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. Equally, the same research question could be explored in the context of these farmers, or perhaps a comparative study between farmers from the Republic of Ireland (i.e., a beneficiary of the EU). Moreover, geographical context matters: a similar study could

be done in another country which generates different findings, especially if carried out in a less economically developed country. This is an area for further research which I am interested in exploring further- entrepreneurship in a developing nation's context.

The inclusion of Weber's work as a theoretical underpinning proved to helpful in exploring the constraints and challenges. I realised that this choice of theoretical lens had shaped my analysis, but equally a different theoretical lens could have been used, which could have led to insights into farmer realities. Some of the findings in the thesis relate to EI, exploring the personal characteristics of upland farmers through a trait based (Carland et al., 1988) approach. However, drawing upon other sociological work, such as Goffman's (1978) impression management or other classical sociologists, such as Karl Marx or Emile Durkheim might also be useful in elaborating our understanding on farmer identities.

In addition, the findings of this research have led to much discussion and theorization of broad strategic management and entrepreneurship concepts within farming contexts. Further research might want to select some of the concepts and try to 'empirically test' these theories, drawing upon larger sample sizes and deductive reasoning. For example, some of the data pointed to the discussions around the 'rural-urban' divide (Tacoli, 1998). Perhaps a large-scale survey could compare and contrast both farmer (insider) and public (outsider) views around contemporary farming issues identified throughout this thesis, such as approaches to environmental farming.

Finally, I believe this is the first study within the context of farm entrepreneurship to utilise Weber's work to analyse 'constrained entrepreneurship' in the English uplands (de Bruin and Dupious, 2003). Future research may want to build upon the iron cage metaphor analysis in other areas of farm entrepreneurship research. Still, there is further scope to draw upon Weberian theory. Agricultural, rural and environmental

policy change is occurring, impacting different types of farmers in heterogeneous manners. It is evident that entrepreneurship is important within the rural economies and for policymakers to encourage rural and farm entrepreneurship practices, the constraints to this must first be understood. This thesis has explored constrained entrepreneurship in the English uplands, understanding the types of business strategies farmers are using to respond to these industry constraints.

#### 9.4 Concluding Thoughts

This thesis set out to answer a relatively simple question: What strategies are English upland farmers using to respond to the constraints and challenges present in the beef and sheep sector? In answering this exploratory question, a few things became evident. First, the beef and sheep sector is filled with adverse challenges to which [entrepreneurial] farmers must respond to. A number of different types of challenges were identified in chapter seven, from personal challenges, such as toxic landlord relationships, to macroeconomic challenges caused by shifting institutional conditions (i.e., BPS removal), to the economic and social challenges influenced by the COVID-19 pandemic.

In trying to analyse the nature of business strategies used in response to these challenges, *types* were created to theorize how farmers manage their farming businesses in response to the challenges in the sector. These typologies highlight the heterogeneity amongst English upland farmers, something which policymakers might consider recognising further. Applying entrepreneurial theories, such as the trait-based (Carland et al, 1998) and behavioural approaches (Gartner, 1998) to entrepreneurship, through the FSF provided insight into how farmers construct [entrepreneurial] identities (Fitz-Koch et al., 2017) to respond to the institutional conditions. Age was found to be an important characteristic, with younger farmers typically utilising entrepreneurial strategies to overcome challenges within the sector.

Older farmers typically had less institutional pressure to utilise innovative and entrepreneurial strategies, residing within their 'velvet cages' (Ritzer et al., 2018). Although the sample was small, women farmers demonstrated entrepreneurial capabilities, with only one of the female farmers interviewed resembling a 'traditionalist' type farmer. Farm size was found to be especially important, with the owners of smaller scaled farms demonstrating 'entrepreneurial bricolage' (Baker and Nelson, 2005).

Rationalization is arguably occurring in every industry and the agricultural sector is no exception. As farmers become more business and entrepreneurially minded, their actions become more rationale and with that comes a loss in traditional social action. Though at present, traditional social action still makes up a large part of the rural environment, and the decline of this may alter the perceptions of the appearance of the countryside. Rust et al. (2021) notes that Brexit offers an opportunity to form new UK domestic policies that may impact how the countryside looks, finding that farms with no livestock were found to be perceived as the most environmentally friendly. The replacement of traditionalist type farmers with more entrepreneurial and business minded farmers could alter the appearance of the countryside, farm labour could be reduced due to efficiency gains, contributing to further social challenges, traditional farming activities such as haymaking with square bales and livestock farming could be reduced, with more farmers joining AES.

Throughout this thesis, an extensive reflexive commentary has been made on the methodological approach, arguing how an 'industry insider' approach has allowed me to explore the phenomena of farm entrepreneurship within upland farming businesses. This builds on McElwee's (2008) and Kuehne (2016) existing work, discussing the methodological implications of interviewing farmers. I comment exclusively on the relativist approach through the conceptualisation of Escher's work, around entering different 'farmer worlds' to interpret and understand the challenges

facing them. The insider approach allowed me to overcome personal research constraints during this PhD, conducting empirical work through a pandemic, using a variety of data collection methods through a combination of ethnographic, phenomenological and case study research.

Using Weber's metaphor of the iron cage has provided a strong theoretical underpinning to this work, something which is often lacking in rural studies research (Suess-Reyes et al., 2016). The iron cage metaphor has not been utilised as a theoretical underpinning in the area of farm entrepreneurship. It has been used as a lens to explore the constraints and challenges facing farmers, providing three types of institutional conditions used to help theorize how farmers are facing and responding through the farm businesses. Policymakers are creating these institutional cages, while policy influencers are helping to re-adjust them to better favour the individuals, which is a difficult task as the impact of policies are extremely relevant to certain individuals, often creating winner or loser scenarios (i.e., subsidies favouring larger farms, constraining tenant farmers). Innovative and entrepreneurial thinking were seen as a means of overcoming constraints, however, during uncertain times, it is difficult to enable innovation. For example, by 2024, farmers will lose 50% of their BPS entitlement, which can make up to 90% of an upland farmers annual FBI. While some farmers may be able to respond entrepreneurially and maintain farm profitability, others simply will not be able to, which could leave many farmers in peril (Gittins, 2021c).

Upland farmers are operating in difficult and uncertain times, with the future looking dreary. While there will always be entrepreneurial farmers who can overcome the barriers in the sector and maintain financially sound and prosperous farming enterprises, change is coming to the UK's farming sector. However, too many unanswered questions remain, such as what role will government play in supporting farmers? What will the future of upland farming look like? What skill sets will be

needed to farm successfully? How might farmers develop digital skills? Future research may seek to explore these questions in greater depth.

Indeed, changes in the macroeconomic environment coupled with adverse market conditions have pressured farmers to pursue different farm business strategies. Some farmers have benefitted from current institutional conditions for many years, maintaining financial profitability from within their velvet cages. However, these institutional conditions are changing. Farmers will now have to exercise entrepreneurial and strategic thinking capabilities to survive and thrive in more environmentally sustainable manners. The future of the English uplands remains uncertain.

Overall, this thesis shows the complicated and chaotic worlds in which farmers orchestrate their business activities. To conclude, the following quote from Jeremy Clarkson is fitting to summarise the realities facing farmers:

“The next time you hear a farmer moaning about the weather, put your arm round him and buy him a pint because he is not moaning about it because he is a bit miserable working out in the rain, he’s moaning about it because it’s crucifying him. (Evans, 2021)”

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## Appendix 1 Ethics

### The University Of Huddersfield Business School Research Ethics Committee

#### Reviewer Proforma

<b>Project Title:</b>	Exploring the realities facing English upland farmers.
<b>Name of researcher (s):</b>	Peter Gittins
<b>Supervisor (where appropriate):</b>	Gerard McElwee
<b>Reviewer name</b>	Gareth Downing
<b>Date sent to reviewer</b>	11/03/20
<b>Target date for review</b>	25/03/20

<b>Issue</b>	<b>Advice / Comments to applicant</b>
<b>Aim / objectives of the study</b>	No issues
<b>Research methodology</b>	No issues
<b>Permissions for study?</b>	No issues
<b>Participants</b>	No issues
<b>Access to participants</b>	No issues
<b>How will your data be recorded and stored?</b>	No issues
<b>Confidentiality</b>	No issues
<b>Anonymity</b>	No issues
<b>Could the research induce psychological stress or anxiety, cause harm or negative consequences for the participants (beyond the risks encountered in normal life).</b>	No issues
<b>Retrospective applications</b>	n/a
<b>Supporting documents (e.g. questionnaire, interview schedule, letters etc)</b>	No issues
<b>Other comments</b>	None

**OVERALL RESPONSE**

<b>APPROVE</b>	<b>x</b>
<b>APPROVE SUBJECT TO RECOMMENDATIONS [please specify]</b>	
<b>APPROVE SUBJECT TO CONDITIONS [please specify]</b>	
<b>FURTHER INFORMATION REQUIRED [please specify]</b>	
<b>REJECT [please specify reasons]</b>	

**Reviewer name: Gareth Downing**

**Date: 20/3/2020**

**Please send review to Business School Research Ethics Committee, Alex Thompson (alex.thompson@hud.ac.uk).**

**The University Of Huddersfield  
Business School Research Ethics Committee**

**Reviewer Proforma**

<b>Project Title:</b>	Exploring the realities facing English upland farmers.
<b>Name of researcher (s):</b>	Peter Gittins
<b>Supervisor (where appropriate):</b>	Gerard McElwee
<b>Reviewer name</b>	Jim Bamford
<b>Date sent to reviewer</b>	11/03/20
<b>Target date for review</b>	25/03/20

<b>Issue</b>	<b>Advice / Comments to applicant</b>
<b>Aim / objectives of the study</b>	No issues
<b>Research methodology</b>	No issues
<b>Permissions for study?</b>	No issues
<b>Participants</b>	No issues
<b>Access to participants</b>	No issues
<b>How will your data be recorded and stored?</b>	No issues
<b>Confidentiality</b>	No issues
<b>Anonymity</b>	No issues

<b>Could the research induce psychological stress or anxiety, cause harm or negative consequences for the participants (beyond the risks encountered in normal life).</b>	No issues
<b>Retrospective applications</b>	N/A
<b>Supporting documents (e.g. questionnaire, interview schedule, letters etc)</b>	No issues
<b>Other comments</b>	

**OVERALL RESPONSE**

<b>APPROVE</b>	<b>X</b>
<b>APPROVE SUBJECT TO RECOMMENDATIONS [please specify]</b>	
<b>APPROVE SUBJECT TO CONDITIONS [please specify]</b>	
<b>FURTHER INFORMATION REQUIRED [please specify]</b>	
<b>REJECT [please specify reasons]</b>	

**Reviewer name** Jim Bamford

**Date** 24/03/2020

**Please send review to Business School Research Ethics Committee, Alex Thompson (alex.thompson@hud.ac.uk).**

Please ensure that the statements in Section C are completed by the applicant (and supervisor for PGR students) prior to submission.

Researcher(s) details	Peter Gittins.
Project title	Exploring the realities facing English upland farmers.
Award (where applicable)	
Supervisor details (where applicable)	Gerard McElwee
Project start date	PhD Start Date: 07/01/2019 Data Collection: June 2020 onwards.

**SECTION B: PROJECT OUTLINE (TO BE COMPLETED IN FULL BY THE APPLICANT)**

<b>Issue</b>	<b>Please provide sufficient detail for your supervisor to assess strategies used to address ethical issues in the research proposal. Forms with insufficient detail will need to be resubmitted.</b>
<b>Aims and objectives of the study.</b> Please state the aims and objectives of the study.	<p>The aim of the thesis is to explore the realities facing upland farmers in England, understanding the entrepreneurial and strategic management practices used by beef and sheep farmers to sustain business competitiveness.</p> <p>The thesis is topical carried out during the UK's exit from the EU. A leave from the EU means the UK is no longer a benefactor of the EU's Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) and has to design its own domestic agricultural policy without consultation from member</p>

	<p>states. The plans for this policy-redesign are outlined in the Agriculture Bill currently progressing through the motions of parliament, soon to become law. To summarise, farm subsidies based upon land ownership are to be removed and farmers will be paid for the production of public goods (increasing biodiversity, improving soil and water quality, access to countryside etc.), replacing existing agri-environmental schemes with Environmental Land Management Systems (ELMS). This change is controversial, some upland farmers rely upon EU subsidy payments for as much as 90% of their farm business income. Moreover, many farmers do not want to join agri-environmental schemes, the existing Countryside Stewardship Scheme under the CAP's Pillar 2, which rewards farmers for conservation efforts, has seen an overall decrease in UK farmer membership, with only 27,500 UK farmers in this agri-environmental scheme, in comparison to 80,000 in this scheme in 2014. The reasons for this are mainly due to the restrictive nature of the schemes, dictating to farmers when they can and cannot farm, alongside with the UK's Rural Payments Agency's poor handling of payments, leaving some farmers without payment for services for three years. Changes to existing agricultural, rural and environmental policies could be detrimental to many upland farm businesses in the UK.</p> <p>An overarching research question and accompanying objectives guide this study:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How are upland beef and sheep farmers responding to the realities facing the sector?</li> </ul> <p>Objectives:</p> <p>To evaluate the nature of farm business strategies used by upland farmers to sustain business competitiveness.</p> <p>To explore the notions of 'farmers as entrepreneurs' and the 'strategic farmer'.</p> <p>To understand the role of context in farm entrepreneurship.</p> <p>To investigate the farm management decision making process.</p>
<p><b>Brief overview of research methodology</b></p> <p>The methodology only needs to be explained in sufficient detail to show the approach used (e.g. survey) and explain the research methods to be used during the study.</p>	<p>The research methodology is qualitative in nature, utilising the case study research strategy to capture the characteristics of farmers and farm enterprises. Semi-structured interviews are used to gain insight into the 'real-world' views of farmers. Photographs are also going to be incorporated into the thesis. Photographs will be of the landscapes and farms themselves and will not be of people.</p> <p>The data collection comprises of Farmer and agricultural stakeholder Interviews (Approx. 30) Semi-structured interviews derived from the literature review</p>

	are to be used to explore the research questions. Accompanying these semi-structured interviews are conversations, photographs and an ongoing research diary.
<b>Does your study require any permissions for study?</b> If so, please give details	I am only concerned with collecting data from the farm holder, not the farm labourers or family. I will supply an information sheet and a consent form to farm holders to outline their role within the study.
<b>Participants</b> Please outline who will participate in your research. Might any of the participants be considered 'vulnerable' (e.g. children)	Farm holders (owners or tenants) are the participants in this study. Specifically ones who farm in upland (hilly, mountainous) regions of the UK and raise cattle and sheep as their main source of income. No participants are considered vulnerable. It is only the farm holders who will be interviewed, I will not be interviewing the farmers family or labourers, I am concerned with the primary decision maker of the farm enterprise. People who identify as upland farmers are interviewed.
<b>Access to participants</b> Please give details about how participants will be identified and contacted.	There are several ways contacts will be identified. Through my own network, I live/work on an upland farm and have many contacts from within this sector. Moreover, throughout my studies I have been networking at rural studies conferences and have met many contacts who can help me gain access to more participants, if I need them. Also, I have a strong presence on social media within farming groups, I can reach out to participants over social media platforms (LinkedIn, Facebook, the Farming Forum). Furthermore, snowball sampling will be used, asking farmers to recommend other farmers within the local area to interview.
<b>How will your data be recorded and stored?</b>	As the thesis is qualitative in nature and interviews are to be used, interviews are, at the participants consent, to be transcribed. Access to these transcriptions will be password protected and uploaded to the university's K drive storage. Field notes and photographs will be kept in a locked draw. At all times I will comply with the University's code of ethics and the 2018 GDPR data protection act.
<b>Informed consent.</b> Please explain how you will inform your participants about the study and whether they will be in a position to give informed consent.	Informed consent shall be given at multiple times throughout the research process. An information sheet will be provided to the participants, allowing them to fully understand the nature of the research before taking part. This is attached to this document.
<b>Right to withdraw</b> Please identify whether you are offering your participants a right to withdraw from the study and/or to withdraw their data from the study and how this will take place. If you are not offering a right to withdraw, please explain why.	Participants will be made aware of their right to withdraw, they may withdraw any data from the research process at the direct participation stage. Participants will be informed that once data has been anonymized they will be unable to withdraw from the study. It is intended that the findings from this study will be disseminated through conference presentations and academic publications.

<p><b>Confidentiality</b> Please outline the level of confidentiality you will offer respondents and how this will be respected. You should also outline about who will have access to the data and how it will be stored. (This information should be included on Information your information sheet.)</p>	<p>Data, transcriptions, photographs, fieldnotes will be kept secure in several ways; appropriate storage in the university's K Drive storage space, kept on a password protected computer. Any hard copies, photos, field notes, consent forms will be kept in a secure locked draw. Those who have access to the data collected will be me (the researcher) and my supervisory team. Direct quotes will be used from the interview data.</p>
<p><b>Anonymity</b> If you offer your participants anonymity, please indicate how this will be achieved.</p>	<p>Pseudonyms will be used to protect individual identities. Locations will be partially anonymized, not revealing the exact location of individual farmers but showing the general area, i.e. 'Farmer John who has farmed in Cumbria for 70 years'</p>
<p><b>Harm</b> Please outline your assessment of the extent to which your research might induce psychological stress, anxiety, cause harm or negative consequences for the participants (beyond the risks encountered in normal life). If more than minimal risk, you should outline what support there will be for participants. If you believe that that there is minimal likely harm, please articulate why you believe this to be so.</p>	<p>This research possesses minimal to no harm to the researcher, the participants or anybody else connected with the study.</p> <p>Physical harm- this type of harm is unlikely in social science research. However, the researcher will take precautionary steps to minimise this risk. If interviews are taken place on farm, then the researcher will adhere to the business practices on the farm. Moreover, the location and time of the interviews will be shared with the supervisory team.</p> <p>Economic harm- A time to conduct the interview will be arranged convenient to the participant. The researcher acknowledges that farmers have very busy periods of work i.e. lambing time, hay making season etc. The researcher will arrange a suitable time with the participants to conduct the interview based around their work schedules.</p> <p>Social harm- farmers live in close knit communities and can face difficult economic times, not wanting their personal information to be leaked into the wider communities. Through anonymity this is reduced.</p> <p>Other than these aspects there is minimal risk to harm, the researcher will act with integrity at all times, adopt a reflexive mentality, and assess at different stages the extent in which harm may be caused to anyone within the study.</p>

**Retrospective applications.** If your application for Ethics approval is retrospective, please explain why this has arisen.

## SECTION C – SUMMARY OF ETHICAL ISSUES (TO BE COMPLETED BY THE APPLICANT)

Please give a summary of the ethical issues and any action that will be taken to address the issue(s).

The general nature of this study presents minimal ethical concerns which may cause physical, economical, social or any other degree of harm.

Listed below are the main issues and how they are addressed:

- 1) Access, Consent and anonymity.

A reflexive approach is adopted, analysing the impact in which harm may be caused at various stages within the research process. Information sheets and consent forms are used to inform the participants of their role within the study. Anonymity is used to protect the individual identities of participants.

- 2) Data management

Overall, I am aware of the minimal risk that may be associated with this type of qualitative research, however, I am also aware that ethical issues and concerns can and do arise. I am knowledgeable in qualitative data collection and analysis techniques and am supported by a supervisory team whom are experienced within this area.

## SECTION D – ADDITIONAL DOCUMENTS CHECKLIST (TO BE COMPLETED BY THE APPLICANT)

**Please supply copies of all relevant supporting documentation electronically. If this is not available electronically, please provide explanation and supply hard copy.**

I have included the following documents

Information sheet                      Yes    ☐

Consent form                              Yes    ☐

Interview schedule                      Yes    ☐

## SECTION E – STATEMENT BY APPLICANT

I confirm that the information I have given in this form on ethical issues is correct. (Electronic confirmation is sufficient).

**and** (for PGR students only)



**Affirmation by Supervisor (where applicable)**

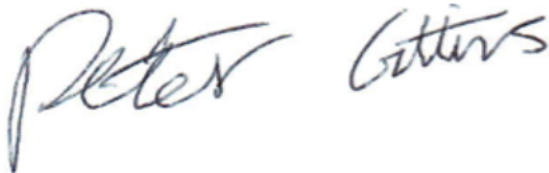
I can confirm that, to the best of my understanding, the information presented by the applicant is correct and appropriate to allow an informed judgement on whether further ethical approval is required

Supervisor name/signature: Gerard McElwee

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Gerard McElwee". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Date: 10/iii/2020

Name of applicant (electronic is acceptable) Peter Gittins

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Peter Gittins". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Date 06/03/2020

**All documentation must be submitted electronically to the Business School Research Ethics Committee Administrator, Alex Thompson, at [alex.thompson@hud.ac.uk](mailto:alex.thompson@hud.ac.uk).**

**All proposals will be reviewed by two members of BSREC. If it is considered necessary to discuss the proposal with the full Committee, the applicant (and their supervisor if the applicant is a student) will be invited to attend the next Ethics Committee meeting.**

If you have any queries relating to the completion of this form or any other queries relating to the Business School's Research Ethics Committee in consideration of this proposal, please do not hesitate to contact the Chair, Dr Eleanor Davies ([e.davies@hud.ac.uk](mailto:e.davies@hud.ac.uk)) ☎ [47] 2121 or the Administrator Alex Thomson ([alex.thompson@hud.ac.uk](mailto:alex.thompson@hud.ac.uk)) ☎ [47] 2529

## Appendix 2: Interview Extracts

Dr Jacob interview extract:

Peter: Do you see yourself as being quite entrepreneurial?

Jacob: Yes [hesitant] because I'm really the only person in the UK who provides an independent service with my mutton. I am looking for other ways to make money that if you like are non-traditional. I'll tell you this. Had I grown up the son of a hill farmer and inherited a hill farm and what have you I probably wouldn't be entrepreneurial, I'd be doing it as my father and grandfather would have done. But it is always hard to tell what extent my scientific career has provided me with the skills and experience to take the entrepreneurial approach.

Gordon interview extract:

Gordon: By far my best strength has been my wife who does the paper work. She is excellent at it. Whereas, I can walk around with my head in the clouds and she will sit down and justify my ideas. By that we analyse whether an idea is any good or not. [strategy formulation process- family]. To me that is the biggest strength we have had over the years.

Peter: Who tends to come up with these new ideas?

Gordon: Errm it tends to be just her really. It's like the other day when we were talking about this wool job. This wool job has taken off big time on us. I said it was worth a try wasn't it love. And She said I knew something else would come along. And that's

what has tended to happen with our business. We see an opportunity and we take it, if it doesn't work it doesn't matter and we'll just wait till the next one comes along. Years ago we used to buy bulls because in them days people could only have 90 bulls, that you could draw subsidy on. And I came across a guy and saw an opportunity in this to take on his extra bulls. I think that's what it is. It's keeping an open mind,"

Roger interview extract:

Peter: So when I say entrepreneurship, or an entrepreneurial farmer? What do you think of when I say that?

Roger: Probably a farmer who has business interests out of farming. One that has many diversification projects.

Peter: Are you an entrepreneurial farmer?

Roger: I'd like to think I was but I'm not sure [laughs]. A little bit. I try, but its not easy it, it's hard being entrepreneurial where I live. I mean I'm 12 miles from the nearest shop or pub or anything like that. If I farmed on the outskirts of a city area, I think I would be extremely entrepreneurial. When you live halfway up a mountain it's a bit more bloody difficult. There is only so much you can do in terms of being entrepreneurial in remote areas.

Hank interview extract:

Peter: Has there been a spike in the number of on farm sales with their meat boxes?

Hank: There probably has but I think what we have to recognise there is that it is small scale, and this is the commercial end of the market, small butchers shops have grown significantly. But small niche box schemes are just that. The volumes going through are small. Also, what you have to think about is that most of the public in the UK can't afford to trade up, because they simply do still buy meat on price. And they can't afford to buy a box scheme. The other issue is that the processing sector have labour

issues around social distancing which has caused a bit of issues for them. The costs of processing the animal has increased because they have to restructure their processing to accommodate to social distancing, this has slowed down lines and made the processing part more expensive. And also some by product leather hides for example, or example, have been lost through the markets because the car industry has been shut down. This is the same with wool as well, so wool is a low value product, the biggest buyer of wool, British Wool, has not been able to sell to their world wide options. Worldwide markets for clothing and carpets and that sort of things have reduced. Closed down.

Nicola interview extract:

Peter: What do you think of when I say farm entrepreneurship? And how important is it?

Nicola: I think of new and innovative and different ideas that help promote business and being efficient. But yeah, new novel and innovative ideas to improve on farm efficiency.

Peter: How important is it?

Nicola: Well very important. New ideas bring improved efficiency, change, animal welfare which are your big ticks in the farm sector. I don't like the term new though, as a lot of it isn't new, its just not been done before on that farm. A lot of our sector are from the those ageing generations so getting those ideas and making them aware innovative ideas to improve animal welfare, or productivity or milk yield, whatever their aim is on farm then putting that information out to them is vital. That's always our challenge, making them aware of these new ideas. If its an app on a phone, if you're in a place without signal then an apps not going to work, so a lot of or apps need to work offline or with poor broadband. We have a next generation programme, we class them as young farmers, that promote this new generation coming into sheep farming. I think a lot of these new entrepreneurial new ideas are really important to

push to them, because they are the next generation of sheep farmers, On the family farm you've probably got grandad, dad and son wants to do something but dad disagrees with it, this is a problem. There is a challenge of getting stuff across to the older generations.