**Aled:** [00:00:09] Hello and welcome. You're listening to episode 50 of Ear to the Ground. The agricultural podcast brought to you by Farming Connect, supporting Welsh farmers to adapt and thrive. I'm your host, Aled Jones, and we have a very special episode in store for you today. I'll be chatting and getting to know the well respected farmer from North Wales, a Farmer's Weekly columnist and the producer and host of the hugely successful Rock and Roll farming podcast, Will Penri Evans.

**Will:** [00:00:39] Probably a bit of an unusual farmer in many ways in I have quite a love hate relationship with farming, and I think I probably always have.

**Aled:** [00:00:49] We'll be finding out how he's ploughing his own furrow by combining his skills for farming, writing and broadcasting.

**Will:** [00:00:56] Well, you saying plough your own furrow. We've literally just bought a direct drill, which is which is which I suppose is.

**Aled:** [00:01:04] And hearing about how his frustration with the way farming was being portrayed in the media led him to start writing a blog.

**Will:** [00:01:12] Yeah, it'd be on the back of the blog. Then someone rang me from Farmers Weekly. Phil Clarke, the deputy editor, rang me and asked me if I could write an regular opinion piece for Farmers Weekly, and I thought it was one of my mates winding me up to start with. And I said, OK, if you know, yeah, I'll give it a bash and see what happens, and I love doing that. It's fantastic.

**Aled:** [00:01:34] His writing then led him to share the farming story through podcasting, and the hugely popular Rock and Roll farming podcast was born. It's a remarkable story, and he never thought the podcast would have such an impact on people.

**Will:** [00:01:48] You get a message from someone who says, I was at a really low period when I heard this episode, and it probably saved my life and I had a few messages like that, and I'm just playing a small part in helping someone like that is, you know what, what a privilege. So.

**Aled:** [00:02:06] Also, we'll be discussing the role of women in agriculture as a part of Farming Connects campaign to support women working in the industry. As a father of four girls, he's had some strange comments over the years and has come across attitudes he's determined to change.

**Will:** [00:02:23] We get variations of you'll keep going for the boy, for the farm, will you?

**Aled:** [00:02:28] And he'll be sharing his experience of taking part in Birmingham Pride recently with AGrespect, an organisation that celebrates LGBTQ+ people living and working in our rural communities.

**Will:** [00:02:40] You know, there was a guy marching in the parade just behind us who was in just a pair of very tight pants and nothing else. So I am. I do now get to threaten the girls that if they don't behave themselves for the next 12 months, that's what I'll do.

**Aled:** [00:02:53] Dad's going to wear those pants.

**Will:** [00:02:56] So I've got that bargaining chip in my favour now.

**Aled:** [00:03:00] Would you post that picture on Twitter? That's the question.

**Will:** [00:03:02] I don't know. I wouldn't want to give too many people nightmares. I'm threatening them with some hot pants and sequins for next year.

**Aled:** [00:03:12] That and plenty more over the next hour, so sit back, relax and enjoy our conversation with Will Penri Evans.

**Aled:** [00:03:29] Well, Will Croeso, welcome to the podcast. How are things with you? How are you keeping?

**Will:** [00:03:35] Oh, really well, thank you, Aled Champion. Enjoying life, enjoying farming and enjoying being with the family. And yeah, yeah. Feeling great.

**Aled:** [00:03:43] Fantastic. I know you've had a very busy period with with harvesting. How's that gone for you this year?

**Will:** [00:03:50] Yeah. Good harvest actually went well this time. We were finished before the Bank Holiday weekend. Pretty good weather here in tropical northeast Wales. I know this year has been an odd one, really, isn't it? It's been really sort of local weather patterns and I know in the east of the country or east of England, they seem to have a lot more rain there than we did in Wales. So harvest went well, yields were OK, we were done nice and early and then I made the mistake I could do every year of thinking once we finished harvest, I won't be quite so busy for a few weeks, but it never quite work out because as soon as you finish, you're thinking about next year's crops and trying to fit in cattle and everything else in the meantime but yeah.

**Aled:** [00:04:34] It's the it's the cycle of farming and the farming calendar never ends isn't it.

**Will:** [00:04:38] No. Exactly, exactly. But no, on the whole, it's gone well.

**Aled:** [00:04:44] Well, Will, it's fantastic to have you on the podcast and you're by far no stranger to being on podcast Zuba. You presented over a hundred and eighty episodes for Rock and Roll farming, and we'll chat some more about Rock and Roll farming in just a minute. But first, how does it feel to be a guest on a podcast instead of being the host asking the question?

**Will:** [00:05:07] It's a lot more pressure on as a guest, I think. Though it's nice not to have to do all the research and editing and production and all that jazz as well.

**Aled:** [00:05:19] I'll have to do that later tonight.

**Will:** [00:05:20] Yeah, yeah, yeah. All you've got to as a guest to turn up answer some questions. So yeah, you're the one with all the work. Yeah.

**Aled:** [00:05:29] Well, you know, this is an opportunity for our listeners to get to know you Will. Clearly, you're a very well-known figure within Welsh farming, but beyond that as well, and particularly through the work you've done with the podcast. But let's start with the farm. The home farm at Lower Eyton. Tell us about the enterprises you've got there. We've touched upon the harvesting, of course, but you've got a very successful beef, arable and poultry business.

**Will:** [00:05:54] Yeah, but I've everything, really. So we were a dairy farm until 2008, sort of quite traditional dairy farm milking about a hundred and twenty cows. And and then we decided for lots of different reasons, really. And you know, ex dairy farmers are now a pretty big demographic in UK farming to go in a different direction. We sold the cows, which was a hugely emotional decision, but I think it was probably the right one and we expanded our arable area and beef enterprise as well. And we farm, so two farms, about 500 acres. We have 300 cattle or, well, it's a bit over about three hundred and thirty at the moment. We buy them all in from neighbouring dairy farms as calves, and then we finish them all. We take them all the way through to finishing all of them. That works well with the arable system because obviously we are of the muck and and then we have a good rotation, we have grassland in the rotation as well. And then we grow maize for the cattle, which also works well in the arable rotation with the combinable crops too. We sell almost all of the cereals to a very local feed mill. What we don't sell when we feed to our own cattle. So it's quite a quite an integrated system, I think, and I'm very passionate really about mixed farming. Generally, it seems to be coming back into fashion again after a long time, which is nice. It's nice to be back in fashion. But but yeah, and I suppose the only other notable thing really is that we are probably quite unusually for Wales, where only 60 feet above sea level and the River Dee runs right the way through the middle of the two farms, which is a blessing and a curse because it's very fertile land. Grow anything but, but we do get quite a lot flooding as well, which increasingly causes us problems. But but yeah, we'll be the only ones in that situation, I'm sure.

**Aled:** [00:08:09] Well, you know, very envious. As a hill farmer's son, I'm very envious of the low lying ground that you've got there. And I often joke with people, you know that, you know, I was born and raised on a farm in Cwrt y Cadno, on the slopes there where we've been vertically farming for years.

**Will:** [00:08:22] Yeah. Well, ours is very, very much horizontal farming. We've barely got any. Any slopes at all.

**Aled:** [00:08:30] Now tell me a bit more about the farming structure because you farm in partnership with your parents. Am I right?

**Will:** [00:08:36] I do. Yeah. So my from a really long line of farmers, we've traced back as far as we can go in this area, which is early, very early seventeen hundreds. All farming. That was just sort of the other side of Wrexham. And then my grandparents moved here in the early nineteen fifties. My grandfather was the youngest boy in a family of 10 children, so there wasn't much left for him at the home farm. So he got the tenancy of a very dilapidated and rundown farm that none of the neighbors wanted. And him and my grandmother moved here when they were very young and set about building a life here, which which they did, and we're still here now. So I am in partnership yeah, with my with my parents who were still very, very active in farming, who work like most farming parents every day and probably will until until they can't and can't any longer. And we very fortunate we get on very well. They're very open minded to change and very supportive of everything I've done, both in and outside of farming and the changes I've made on the farm. They couldn't have asked for more supportive and more open minded parents in that regard. Yeah. And then I live here in the farm with my wife Sarah and four young daughters and I recently, we are tenant farmers, by the way, I should have should have mentioned that a tenancy and I am now the tenant as of as of quite recently. So.

**Aled:** [00:10:18] Oh, fantastic. Yeah, that's that's really good news. And growing up on the farm, did you always want to wanted to be a farmer?

**Will:** [00:10:27] I think so. I've been asked this question before I did, and I didn't. Probably, probably a bit of an unusual farmer in many ways. I have quite a love hate relationship with farming, and I think I probably always have. So I grew up, I probably always was going to be a farmer because as well, I kind of didn't hate it school didn't fit in, just spent my time looking out the window looking at tractors, driving past the road like a lot of farmer's sons and couldn't wait to leave. So I left school as soon as I could and went home to the farm, and I don't think I ever really considered doing anything else, you know, and I don't think it was ever thought that I would do anything else by any kind of members of the family. So. So I left home. I wasn't even I wasn't even 16 when I left school, came home. With zero qualifications really to speak of. And then that was kind of early 90s, mid mid-nineties and then I. A few years later, BSE hit, and I suddenly what I where I'd, where I'd thought when I left school, Well, I've got a job for life now. No, everyone will. Everyone ever will need food and I need to worry about qualifications and then suddenly be a C hit and prices went through the floor and it was a really difficult time, I remember sort of seeing my parents seem to like age, you know, a lot during that time, a very difficult period. And I suddenly thought, Well, Christ, if this all goes pear shaped, I need to get some qualification. So I I went to Harper Adams and did a did a HND in agriculture there. I think I was twenty twenty one when I started, but that was that was fantastic and I made lots of friends there from lots of different farming sectors and different areas of the country. And that really opened my eyes, I think, to different farming systems, different methods of farming and changes that we could make here. Think I think it just sort of broadened my horizons, really?

**Aled:** [00:12:30] Yeah.

**Will:** [00:12:30] So oh yeah.

**Aled:** [00:12:31] And what changes did you introduce at the home farm after being in Harper? Did you come back brimming full of ideas and enthusiasm to change things up?

**Will:** [00:12:42] Yeah, I probably did. Probably probably annoyed my dad. No end by coming home. And, you know, as everyone does, I suppose, when they come back from studying agriculture at university and then they come back and they go to their dad, we should be doing this and it's like, Well, hang on a minute. But um yeah, I think so. I mean, we were quite fortunate that in my in my life, just as I left, a neighbouring farm, came up to rent. We put in a tender for that and we got it. And that's that sort of meant that we were increased in size a lot. And then we were it was easier to make changes, I suppose. So that really was what led us then to in a few years later, kind of going down the route of farming more arable crops. And I mean, we're not too fixed with or I like to think we're not too fixed with anything we've done. We've made a lot of changes for you over the years. I'm not too wedded to any particular kind of system. We try and be quite flexible. But but yeah, I did come home with quite a lot of ideas. But yeah, some of them, some of them are really only just getting around to implement it now.

**Aled:** [00:13:54] But farming is a long term business, but it's really interesting to hear you see, hear you say about, you know, how agile you want to be within that business so you're not wedded to one particular system. You've got to be a little bit more flexible. And you know, even with the recent announcements around the BPS in Wales being extended to twenty twenty three and extensions like Glastir and obviously on the on the horizon in January, twenty twenty five, a completely new farming scheme will come in. To what extent do you think that influences your your farming policy decisions? Do you tend to to weave your way around the support payments? Or do you try and plough your own furrow, do what you want to do and see whether those schemes fit in with with your with your bigger plans?

**Will:** [00:14:41] Well, you say in plough your own furrow, we've literally just bought a direct drill, which is which is which I suppose is, you know, which is one thing. I mean, I am very conscious of it and especially as a tenant farmer, because this single farm payment and subsidies, direct payments, whatever you want to call them, you know, they've paid a big proportion of our rent over the years, every year. So, you know, you can't kind of shrug your shoulders and brush it off. It's going to be a serious change. I mean, I'm pretty confident we will weather the storm on that regard. I think there will be other opportunities. I hope there will be with, well, I say there will be other opportunities. I'm not particularly confident that they'll get the new environmental schemes right, but I hope I'm proven wrong on that. I hope there'll be opportunities there because we've never really been able to get in one before because the various tenancy restrictions. But I hope that changes and I do think they're, you know, I'm quite encouraged by the way the Welsh Government have consulted with a lot of farmers about these things, but remains to be seen whether they'll get it right. But I'm going to mention the director. I mean, that's one of the things we're trying to look at. We're trying to be more I mean, that will that is a two pronged benefit in that one that we'll be using a lot less diesel. We'll hopefully be a lot more cost efficient in growing crops, focusing on margin rather than yield, which is perhaps is something we we've all done for too long. So I mean, I'm still I mean, we've literally just sown crops without this week. So I'll be I'll sleep a lot better when I see them growing out of the ground. But it's been a quite big decision. But yeah, I mean, we are looking at different things and different. We're trying to diversify a little bit. My wife's starting a business on the farm, so she's going to basically like a lot of people over lockdown and she's got very into growing vegetables and she's we're about, we're about to put up quite a big poly tunnel and she's going to start growing vegetables and delivering them locally and and all that kind of thing. We're looking sort of various ways we can direct, sell a bit and cut out the middleman. And I mean, I've got no sort of revolutionary ideas, but you know, we are we are very focused on it and we're trying to very much kind of streamline and cut costs where we can.

**Aled:** [00:17:04] Yeah. And and the key to diversifying and establishing a successful sideline to the business or additional income stream is very often getting your marketing right and one of the key skills you've got and fantastic and it comes across in your writing, in your podcasting is you've got that wonderful way of communicating the story. And was that a skill you knew you had before you sort of dipped your toe in the water because you've started writing a blog initially. That was before you started the podcast, so you had that sort of inner urge or in a desire to start writing, sharing the story and communicating. Was that something you knew you had or what sort of spurred you on?

**Will:** [00:17:48] Um, maybe I have to I have thought about this really. I as I, as I mentioned, I sort of left school with very little qualifications, but I was always a big reader and I've always loved sort of literature and history. And my my grandmother, my father's mother, was quite in that very sort of traditional Welsh working class kind of Eisteddfod kind of fashion brought was a big influence on my life, really and kind of very much sort of talk to me about that kind of thing and recommended books to me and encourage me with that kind of stuff when I was young. So I think that kind of. I always wanted to write, but never probably had the confidence to do it, I guess, and well, and when I was younger, I certainly wouldn't have known how to and then sort of I don't know when it was really about, perhaps about six years ago, I was trying to, like a lot of us, communicate the farming story a bit better. I was a bit frustrated by the way we were being portrayed in the media, and so I just kind of randomly thought have a go at writing a blog and I had no, I had no idea what I was doing. I just. But I suppose it was just something inside me that just made me have a go at it. And then I, I guess, like a lot of people, you start these things and then a few people say they've enjoyed it, and then that gives you a bit of confidence and then you try something else and. You know, it just kind of went from there, really, and yeah, on the back of the blog, then someone rang me from Farmers Weekly. Phil Clarke, the deputy editor, rang me and asked me if I could write an opinion regular opinion piece for farmers weekly, and I thought it was one of my mates winding me up to start with. And I said, OK, if you know, yeah, I'll give it a bassh and see what happens, and I love doing that. It's fantastic. And I, yeah, I wish I could. I wish my grandmother was still around to so I could tell her so I could tell her that, you know, all that encouragement she gave me when I was young has led to that. I think she'd be pretty pleased about it, so

**Aled:** [00:20:02] I'm positive she will be. And you've written several opinion pieces, and I must say that they're all well written. They're witty, they're very, very catchy. And there's one in particular that I want to mention a little later on in this podcast. But before we dive into that, I want to pick up on your podcasting journey. So, so soon after starting the blog, you were tempted then to get into audio and you started podcasting right at the very beginning really. I think podcasting has had a massive surge in popularity, say, in the last couple of years, but you were in well before then. You got the timing bang on.

**Will:** [00:20:37] Yeah. Again, it was kind of building on wanting to tell the farming story, really. And I was a very early listener to podcasts in general, but not not farming ones, just sort of sport and history and general knowledge and things and. And then I came across a few farming ones in the states. And I just thought, Oh, man, wouldn't it be great if there was one of these here? And then I was a bit frustrated because I thought, Well, why aren't any other kind of farming unions or, you know, levee boards or anything? Why aren't they doing that? Because it's such a sort of really good medium and they come across so well. And then I just suddenly hit me. I thought, Well it's no good kind of whingeing and moaning that no one else is doing this. If you want to do it, you've got to, you've got to make it happen yourself. So that was it, really. I didn't give it an awful lot more than that. So I just sort of thought, Well, I'll give it a go. And I and I I suppose I'd been on social media for a bit. So I knew quite a lot of farmers on there, and I sort of was aware of of of how good a lot of farmers are at telling their stories and how natural natural they are at communication. And I messaged sort of 20 or so of them just said, Look, if I started a podcast, would you do an interview? And they all said yes. Well, once I explain what our podcast was, they all said yes, that would be great. And that was it really bought a microphone and got on YouTube and looked at how to make a podcast. And that was it, really. And I didn't really expect it to go anywhere. And one of the things I did consciously decide was I didn't want to just aim it at farmers. I wanted to try to aim it at farmers and non farmers, and a few people said to me, that won't work. You've got to you've got to have a very specific audience. But I didn't listen to them and I thought, you know, I'll just try and make it quite light hearted and not too technical, but really tell the human stories behind farming and food production. And you know, and as we both know, both of us being so rooted in the farming community, there are just so many incredible human stories. And every every farmer has one, and whether your 10th generation, first generation or whatever sector you're in. You've got a you've got a story to tell, why we're why we're living this life less ordinary. So yeah, that was it, really. And then that's just led to all kinds of.

**Aled:** [00:23:13] and it's opened doors.

**Will:** [00:23:13] Crazy opportunities.

**Aled:** [00:23:13] Yeah, it's led to many, many things. It's been a fantastic springboard for you. But what's also fascinating is that you're all totally self-taught. You had to learn recording skills, get the equipment you did all the editing, all the packaging up yourself. Do you enjoy that side of things or do you just prefer just talking and you'd much prefer somebody else to do all the boring cutting and editing?

**Will:** [00:23:38] No, no. I actually do really enjoy every aspect of it, to be honest, even even the um. So you know, it would start off with, obviously, you know, you've got a contact someone initially you get their number or message on social media or whatever and ask them if they want to do an interview and even even that all that kind of planning and going back and to and kind of, you know, some people are really kind of excited to be asked and that's, you know, just, you know, you can tell straight away that they're looking forward to it. And that kind of aspect to it is great. And then, you know, doing a bit of research and putting the questions together, all that kind of stuff just just kind of really enjoyed it. But I suppose I did enjoy the the conversations the most. And I think one of the things I. Another thing that someone actually people told me not to do was was everybody said at the start, you've got to keep it to about twenty five 30 minutes because after that, people would just lose lose interest. But I very quickly realized that, well, maybe it's just I'm really bad at editing, I don't know. But but I was so interested in what people were saying. So in the end, I actually wasn't doing much editing at all. It wasn't much I was cutting out because I just thought it was so interesting. And you know, you have an hour, hour and a half, sometimes two hour conversation with people that it can get pretty intimate. You know, you can you're talking about real difficulties often that they've overcome or challenging periods they've been through in their life. And, you know, sometimes the people on the podcast had never talked about that with anyone else. And, you know, huge credit to them for talking about those things. And often they said to me afterwards, God, that really helped to me just talking about it, and some of the feedback they got afterwards really helped them. And you know, that's a pretty special thing to be part of, I think. And yeah, so yeah, I loved every part of it and the editing, actually, I really I really enjoy editing now. But yeah, it was the conversations that were with the best thing about it.

**Aled:** [00:25:41] Well, seeing that you enjoy editing so much, can I send some over to you over?

**Will:** [00:25:48] I'm retired now,

**Aled:** [00:25:51] But but no, you know, having listened to several of your episodes, you know, and you're bang on right. You know you. You keep them very raw. They're not over edited, and it does feel as if you're just listening in on a conversation between two really good friends. And it's wonderful, really warm conversations that you've had and to do over 180 of them. And I know you've mentioned there's plenty of characters, but but have you, from time to time struggled to get people on or has it been, has it been difficult to have the self-discipline to make sure I've got to get somebody lined up now for the next one of the next one or the next one? Because that's a hundred and eighty is a lot of episodes.

**Will:** [00:26:27] Yeah, in terms of of struggling to find people on, honestly, no. And I when I finished the podcast a few weeks ago, I've still got a list of like probably over a hundred names of people I still wanted to interview. But self discipline, I am. It sometimes there were there were times when, especially when really busy and I had a very difficult year in 2019 for lots of different reasons. Farming was a horrendous harvest that year and we had lots of flooding and it was just a really difficult farming year and I found it quite hard then, things got on top of me a bit and it was hard to, you know, it's very as much as I love doing it. I love doing the podcast. It is very time consuming, doing it all and under often end up kind of doing it very late at night or early in the morning and whilst juggling farming and family life and everything. And it did. It did get a bit difficult at one point, but. On the whole. No, because I just enjoyed doing it so much, and, you know, throughout and throughout the whole time of the podcast, I always got messages every week really from new listeners or people or sometimes from the other side of the world, or sometimes from people who just listened every week who who sent me sort of really quite heartfelt messages, you know, thanking me and saying particular episodes have got them through difficult times in their life or really helped them realize they're not on their own with different things, or sometimes just inspired them to make changes on their farm or just, I don't know, made them laugh. And and I think it was probably those kind of messages that that that kept me going with it, I guess.

**Aled:** [00:28:22] I'm sure it gave you a massive warm feeling inside when you were getting those messages and just reinforces all the efforts and work you put into it was worth it. And even if it just makes a change in one person's life, it it's worth it. Yeah, sure. It's been massively rewarding.

**Will:** [00:28:40] Yeah, without a doubt. And you know, I mentioned this before, but some of the episodes where we talked about mental health, you know, I lost count the amount of messages and emails and things from people who said, you know how hearing that and this is all down to the guests for opening up and talking about it and being brave enough to come on and and talk about it. But. You know, you get a message from someone who says I was at a really low period when I heard this episode and it's probably saved my life and I had a few messages like that and, you know, always sort of kept in touch with those people. And, you know, just playing a small part in helping someone like that is quite, you know what? What a privilege. So.

**Aled:** [00:29:33] Absolutely. Yeah. And I've reflected on that a few times and thinking, you know, when people are under stress and are feeling a bit low, it takes a lot of courage sometimes to pick up the phone to ask for help. But if they can tune into a podcast and listen to something and hear somebody else's life story, that can be enough just just to help them deal with that situation. And possibly you're reaching out to people who wouldn't reach for help through a podcast. It's something quite quite special.

**Will:** [00:30:04] Yeah, I totally agree.

**Aled:** [00:30:06] And I was quite glad you said that listening to the podcast was sometimes just like listening to, hearing two friends chat in a pub or something, because that was something that I very consciously wanted to do. And I think on what you've just said, that is quite good because it's not. You know, I'm not sort of saying to people with a podcast that, you know, you should do this or you shouldn't. I'm just we're just having those conversations and hopefully, just by hearing them, you know it, it makes people yeah, just realize that me and the guest, we're just two normal people having a chat and no different to anyone else. So yeah, I think the podcast format works quite well in that regard.

**Aled:** [00:30:51] Now I know you're very humble about your success, but but please tell us how many downloads as rock and roll farming had of the past few years?

**Will:** [00:31:01] Yeah. Well, I mean, it's getting pretty close to two million now, which is which is, you know, pretty mind blowing in and in over well over a hundred different countries. So. You know, she told me that at the start that that just chatting to farmers about their lives would would impact so many people, and I would have I would have laughed. But it just shows, doesn't it, that that people are interested in in farming or are interested in food production and where their food comes from and the people who produce it? And I think, you know, a lot of people, yeah, maybe in wider industry, maybe. Perhaps need to to maybe put themselves out of their comfort zone a little bit, you know, we can be quite conservative in farming, can't we? And we tend to sort of go for the safe bets. But I think it just shows that sometimes if you are willing to try something a bit different, it can pay dividends. I think.

**Aled:** [00:32:09] And with almost two million downloads, which is an incredible figure, I knew you'd crossed a million some time ago, but you know those figures, those listener figures will continue to go, although you will no longer be producing more episodes because you have decided, I'm sure it was a tough decision to make, but you have decided to let rock and roll farming go.

**Will:** [00:32:31] Yes, I have as much as I love doing it and I did that and it's, you know, in many ways changed my life, really. But. You know, I've done it for four and a half years and a few different things, one I think, you know, always think you should, you know, you shouldn't perhaps do the same thing for too long. And I've got a few other ideas. I might jump back into the podcasting game at some point with a slightly different podcast and maybe a slightly different format, although I am going to take a break for now. But I've just also, you know, when I started it, my kids were all quite young. Now they're a little bit older and they're getting into sports teams and different clubs and societies, and they need running here, there and everywhere and they've grown up so quickly. My oldest is in the last year of primary school now, and you know, I just the podcast did take up a huge amount my time and I and I just need that time back for the family and my wife's starting an exciting new business and I really want to help her. She need what I need to sort of give her some time and support her as well. She's been so supportive of me with everything I've done over the last few years, so that's really exciting too. And some of the changes will make it on the farm and various other things I'm involved in as well. You know, it's just I just felt like it felt like the right time. I will miss it and I'm sure I'll come back in at some point. But but yeah, I've hung up the microphone for now.

**Aled:** [00:34:11] For now. But yeah, and I used to do a lot of public speaking and public speaking competitions, and I was always told leave the audience wanting more. So I'm I'm certain you've certainly left your listeners wanting more and I'm sure there will be more to come from Will Penry Evans with that skill and that charisma that you've got for podcasting, then then they'll let that skill go to waste. But as you've mentioned then, I think it's a really good important point. We want to try and get across in this podcast is that family is important to you, your wife, Sarah and your four daughters, Gwendolyn, Ffion Mair and Branwen they're your number one.

**Will:** [00:34:47] They are. Yeah, yeah, they are. Without sounding cheesy, you know, I'm a huge family man. I adore having children. The days my kids were born, obviously the happiest days of my life. And we are a big family. Quite loud, quite noisy. I like to think we have a lot of fun and you know, I just adore the fact that they are being brought up on a farm. I felt very lucky over the last 18 months with COVID and the lockdown and restrictions, the kids have never been sort of short of space to run around and make a noise in they've, you know, and they do take advantage of that.

**Will:** [00:35:28] But you know what? What a privileged upbringing they have in growing up on a farm. I I had a wonderful childhood growing up on a farm, always wanted to have children and them to grow up on a farm and have the same upbringing as I have. And you know, I feel very fortunate that the my children are able to do that. So yeah, it's yeah, very, very, very lucky, man.

**Aled:** [00:35:55] Absolutely. And this podcast happens to coincide with Farming Connects Women in Agriculture campaign, and there's one opinion piece which I did mention earlier on, though I wanted to talk about that you wrote back in back in March this year for the Farmers Weekly. The headline reads Ability, not gender is everything when it comes to farming. So what made you write that piece?

**Will:** [00:36:19] Um, I think I just got a bit bored of people saying to me, obviously I've got four daughters and was saying to me and Sarah, we get variations of you'll keep going for the boy for the farm, will you? And we've interestingly had that from, now people would probably think that only blokes would say that would only men would say it. But I've had that from men, I've heard it from women, I've had it from farmers and I've had it from non farmers. So I think it's quite interesting how that idea of farming being very sort of patriarchal, father to son not only is quite common in farming, but it's common outside of farming as well. And I just. I was just sort of frustrated with it, really, and I just got to a point where I'd seen a few other people say similar things. Other people who'd got daughters in farming, I know have had similar experiences and I just thought, Well, I'm going to put pen to paper about this and try and write about it. And and it got a really good reaction actually, from from from all around the world, I got lots of people getting contact and mostly positive, you know, from from other men who got just daughters and from a lot of women as well, who'd who were either working in farming now, younger women or actually got some quite nice messages from older women who'd who'd never been allowed the chance to farm when they were younger and would have liked the chance, but but, you know, their fathers kind of pass the farm on to their brother or whatever. And you know, I found that quite moving, actually.

**Aled:** [00:38:09] Yeah.

**Will:** [00:38:10] So so yeah, it was it was just that really. It was sort of just born out of frustration because it's just such a ridiculous attitude.

**Aled:** [00:38:18] It is shocking. But what I'm really interested to know is, you know, faced with that sort of comment. What did you say back? How did you respond? Did you bite your tongue and just put pen to paper and wrote the opinion piece? Or did you try and correct them there and then and say, oh sorry, but your views are just out of step?

**Will:** [00:38:37] Yeah, I've done both. I remember when Branwen was born, our youngest was born and somebody said that to me, I was I was actually having, it was a physio. I had a bad back at the time, probably from lifting up too many small children and I'd gone for physio and Branwen had just been born a couple of days before and I was, you know, I had that new new dad spring in my step and I bounced into the physios and physios room to have treatment. And the physio said to me, you're obviously down, of course, and said, oh you know has your wife had the baby. I said, Yes, you know, I was a girl and and she just kind of looked at me and said, Oh, what a shame for you in the farm. And I was so I was so taken aback. And I actually I actually I ended it. I walked out and I never went back because I was really upset about it after, and I got more upset about it after because I was upset, not really for me, but but for Branwen really, even though she'd only just been born, it was just such a I mean, I'm sure the lady was a lady physio. I'm sure she didn't mean anything by it. And, you know, not saying she's a bad person or anything, but. I don't know, I just found it really upsetting because it's just, as I say, it's just such a, I don't know, I just I just don't understand that attitude because it's not as if women in farming is a new thing. I mean, I mentioned at the start in almost all my family are in farming in some way, shape or form. You know, and I like to think of this opinion, if I had four sons as well, by the way, because they've got four daughters. I've also got a mother who was, you know, very hands on still with a farm and always has been. My grandmothers were my great grandmothers were, you know, I've got a photo somewhere, a very old picture of my of a great great grandmother in like the mid eighteen hundreds holding about five kids in her arms and still running the farm because her husband died quite young. And you know this idea that women shouldn't or can't be farmers, it's just so patently absurd, it's it's, you know, the idea that we're still talking about it is is just a shame, really, I think.

**Aled:** [00:40:53] Yeah, it almost gender is irrelevant. It's almost it shouldn't need a conversation around it, but sadly, from time to time, it does. And you know, looking your four daughters, do you think any of them will will want to follow in your footsteps because you wrote this wonderful line in that opinion piece, saying that Evans and daughters as a very nice ring to it?

**Will:** [00:41:18] Yeah. Nothing, nothing would make me prouder if they wanted to, but, you know, I haven't I don't know whether they will want to or not, I suspect at least one or more of them possibly will, but I'm certainly not pushing and they've got to find it themselves, I think. And you know, I would probably if I was going to encourage them to do anything, I would encourage them to go away and probably work somewhere else for a few years first and then, you know, develop a few different skills and get a bit of different experience in different sectors or even completely different industries. But. Yeah, if they if they if they want a farm, then yeah, I would, I would love that. But equally, if they don't want to farm, then you know, my life will probably be a bit easier as I get older.

**Aled:** [00:42:10] But but the wonderful thing about agriculture is that, you know, there's so many different career paths you can take within the industry. And that's another thing we want to highlight in this podcast is there's so many career opportunities and you're an example of a full time practical farmer who's also an accomplished broadcaster. And there's got skills and interests other than farming, but it's linked to agriculture. So there's a need for quite a broad range of skills in modern farming.

**Will:** [00:42:39] Oh, for sure. And and more and more so. I mean, the opportunities now in farming now in 2021, there's never been so many different roles you can take. You know, you look at the sort of tech revolution that's that's happening around us. You know, there's so many opportunities for young people to come into this industry. And, you know, despite all the the challenges and there always has been challenges in farming, by the way, I'm reading my grandmother's diaries from the nineteen forties and fifties at the moment, and they had some really hard times then as well. You know, it wasn't all wasn't all sunshine and roses then, but you know, the opportunities are there and it's such an exciting time in terms of tech and where that's going to be in sort of 10, 20 years and the wide range of opportunities. I mean, I regularly speak to young people and I do farmer time where I speak to children from different backgrounds, different schools and sort of show them the opportunities there are in farming. And I think it blows their mind because they have these kind of preconceived ideas that it's all kind of, you know, old men on sticks, driving tractors and, you know, moving sheep and cows around. But you know, I always say to them actually at the start of the calls, especially when you speak to a new class, I always ask them a question of, you know, what do you think a farmer is and what do you think a farmer looks like? And you know, they do come up with those kind of very storybook things, and sometimes the teachers got the class to then draw pictures of what they think a farmer looks like. And then when I've spoken to them for a few months and had those regular conversations with them, it's just amazing to see how it changes. And then at the end, they I ask them again, OK. I've been talking to you for several months now. What do you think a farmer looks like now? And they will draw a completely different picture of a farmer, very often, usually on a phone. But, you know, in a different dress, you know, an odd dress, not actual dress, but dress dress differently. You know, whereas to start with, you know, it was almost always in a checked shirt and a flat cap. And well, it's, you know, often then they, you know, they'll they'll draw a very different picture of what a farmer looks like now. And I think that's fantastic. And I think the more farmers can get involved with that kind of thing and we can dispel some of the myths and stereotypes, the better that is for all of us.

**Aled:** [00:45:19] Yeah, absolutely. And you know, when you're spending time with your daughters and thinking about the future skills they're going to need, if they if they want to enter the industry. And you mentioned a little earlier on about the tech revolution around farming. Where do you see the skill sets? Or if you were to go to Harper Adams today, what do you think would be the most important thing that you'd want to learn there?

**Will:** [00:45:43] Well man Aled, that's a really good question.

**Aled:** [00:45:46] Being on the spot.

**Will:** [00:45:48] Yeah, I think for me, so I actually did meet up with some Harper mates not long ago and we were talking about this actually would we would we go to Harper and study agriculture now? Or would we or would we study something completely different? Would we study? Would we still go to Harper and do something like agri business? Or would we go to a totally different university and study to meet totally different, economics, for example, or something like that, but then still come home to farm? And it was quite a good conversation, really. With the girls, you know, I don't know I would I would definitely encourage them to do something else, but I mean, it does depend what they want to do. If they set their heart on studying something like agriculture, then I'll wholeheartedly support them. I think the skills, I mean, I say this goes, you know, the core skills will always be there when they, you know, business, communication. Communication is really important. I think if you can communicate, you know, we see that a lot with problems with succession and things with farming, don't they? A lot of that just comes down to problems with communication. So I think if you can communicate and you can, I mean, I mean, I say that I've never been particularly good at communicating. My wife's helped me a lot in that regard. My wife is an excellent communicator and she's always sort of encouraged me in that regard. So I think I've got a bit better at it. But yeah, I think those sort of core skills that always be really important. But yeah, you know, technology just, I mean, God, you know, I'm forty three and the way that farming has changed in my farming career, goodness me, you know, twenty years, it's so different. So in another twenty years, you know, what is it going to look like then? And it's it's very exciting I think. I'm not I'm not daunted by the change. I'm I'm excited by it, and I think certainly young people should be. It's such an exciting time to be in to be or to be going into farming.

**Aled:** [00:47:46] Yeah. Couldn't agree with you any more. And the other exciting thing that you're involved with is, I guess this is one of the opportunities that might have come come on the back of the podcast. On the back of the the writing that you've been doing for the Farmers Weekly is that you're now one of the directors of the Oxford Farming Conference. How did that come about and how you enjoying that experience?

**Will:** [00:48:08] Yeah, absolutely love being involved to the conference. So in it, I guess it would have been twenty seventeen. Matt Naylor, former former chairman of the of the conference and Farmers Weekly columnist, I'm very now very good friend of mine sent me a message saying Have you considered applying for the Oxford Farming Conference Emerging Leader program? And I said, What's the Oxford Farming Conference? I don't know what it is. And then, you know, I kind of thought, Well, that's just for big arable farmers from the south east of England, isn't it? And he sort of explained that, no, it wasn't. And you know how much the conference has changed in recent years. And so I looked into it and I thought, Oh, well, I'll give that a bash. I'm in the spirit of putting myself outside my comfort zone. I'll I'll see what I can do. And so I put in an application and I was successful, and I arrived at the conference with probably the biggest case of imposter syndrome Oxford has ever seen because I certainly don't think of myself as a leader, and I looked around and I thought, Gosh, everyone else in this group is more talented and more skilled than me. And then when I got to know them all, of course, they were all feeling that way. And that's been quite an important realization for me, actually. And some of those people are really talented, highly intelligent people who've gone on to very important roles in farming and you know, it was almost a bit of a penny drop moment for me that, yeah, everybody feels like that, and once once I realized that I just felt a lot better about life generally, I think. But yeah, I did the program. Loved the conference from from the moment I arrived really, that kind of historic setting of being in Oxford University, in those buildings and being in the conference hall and going to the dinner at night in Christchurch College, in the dining hall, which is where they set the which is where the Harry Potter banquet scenes are filmed. And you know, that sort of history and legacy aspect was so as a as a full on paid up history geek was incredible for me, but also the fact that the conference was such a diverse and inclusive, vibrant place. And the conference isn't there to provide answers for agriculture, but what it is is there is to stimulate conversation and provide a platform for that. And it's such a force for good in UK agriculture and the speakers they have there are so challenging and inspiring. And I just came away from that conference just absolutely buzzing and I came home and it just gave me such a lift and inspired me so much to be able to make some changes and to really kind of put myself out there. And my fellow, the fellow emerging leaders, have now become really good friends and we chat all the time on a WhatsApp group and we go to each other for advice. And it's a valuable network, I think, for us all. And then, yeah, a couple of years ago, then Sally Williams, again, another former former chairman of the conference, Dairy Farmer up in Scotland and Sally's brilliant, and another chairman who really took the conference forward and really kind of made some really positive changes I think. Sally said to me, have you ever thought about applying to it to be a director? And I said, No, I haven't, because I look at the really talented directors there, and I'd never would have put myself in that bracket. And she said, Well, why don't you give it a go? So again, I put in an application, did an interview, spoke first interview I've ever done, probably spoke about a million miles an hour, which is probably what I'm doing now and just garbled on for about an hour and miraculously was accepted. And I have loved every second sense of brilliant, brilliant, proactive, modern thinking group of directors who are a joy to work with, really diverse and vibrant board who, you know, I think we work really well together. I love that team feel of working as a team towards something. I get a lot out of it and I've it's just been an amazing experience. And midway through, well, I suppose they started in January and my first conference as a director will be this January. So it's just just brilliant. And we just launched the we've changed the name to the Emerging Leader programme is now we've changed the name to the Inspire programme. We've just launched that now. So if anyone is listening, there are 18 fully funded places. I would love to see more people from Wales at the conference. So if you are aged between 30 to forty five and you've never been to the conference before, there's 18 fully funded places available. So you don't think it's for other people. Don't suffer from imposter syndrome like I did. Please, please, please think about applying because it could well be one of the best things you've ever done.

**Aled:** [00:53:27] Yeah, absolutely. I wholeheartedly support that because I've been very lucky to attend a couple of occasions, and a few years ago I was invited to take part in the the Oxford farming debate in that famous Oxford Union, an experience I shall never, ever forget. It was absolutely amazing, and there is quite a special atmosphere in Oxford at that time of year. And yeah, I 100 percent go for it any opportunity you can get to attend and it will be brilliant to get more Welsh people there.

**Will:** [00:53:56] Yeah, I definitely want to see more Welsh. By the time I finish as a director, I want to, I want to be walking through that conference hall and here Welsh accents everywhere.

**Aled:** [00:54:05] Yeah, we'll have a Welsh session and we'll have some translation to translate everything into English.

**Will:** [00:54:10] We should, we should.

**Aled:** [00:54:13] But the big question is Will will we see Will Penri Evans as the future chair, possibly of the Oxford Farming Conference? Is that likely to happen? It's about time we have a Welshman at the helm.

**Will:** [00:54:25] Well, I don't know. I don't know. We've got a really talented group of directors that I, I honestly, I mean, this is very much a footballer's or a Politicians answer now, but I honestly just adore being part of the team and any any of the any of the current directors would make fantastic chairman. So yeah, well, I just love being involved.

**Aled:** [00:54:46] Yeah, no. And we're very proud of you Will and glad that you're involved with such an iconic farming event. But as we draw this podcast to a close, where next then Will I know you've got a busy farming enterprise, a lot of things happening with a family and your wife's new business. The podcast has come to an end for now, but I'm sure you will re-emerge in some form or another in the podcasting world with all those skills. But what's going to be your focus now for the next, say, 12 months?

**Will:** [00:55:16] I think it's primarily the farm and the farm and family really. We are making some changes, a couple of opportunities for for expansion of the farm and business are very early days as well that I'm looking at, and I think it's just the time a lot of farmers, I'm sure, will be the same in this regard at the moment with all the changes that are coming, we talked about earlier. You know, I'm just really focusing on the farm. I mean, you look at the news at the moment with a fuel crisis and food supply chains, you know, stretched to the limit. I think you've got to really look at the business and you know, efficiencies, you've got to really focus on the figures and sort of what's making you money or what isn't and my parents, although they're still incredibly active, you know they are, they are getting older, I'm conscious of it. I don't, I want them to be at a point where they don't have to work lots and lots of hours every day of the week. If they don't want to, you know, if they want to do a bit less, I want them to be able to. So that's something I'm quite focused on as well. So yeah, it really it's just the farm and family for the next 12 months. And you know, despite everything else I do, and as much as I adore doing the podcast and the farming conference and everything, I am first and foremost a farmer and I'm happiest on the farm and that's what I'm going to be concentrating on for the future.

**Aled:** [00:56:47] And there's one other thing that I want to squeeze in before I ask the final question Will. And that's to pick up on on a recent event that you attended, you attended the Birmingham Pride Festival with a good friend of yours. Several good friends, I should say. But how is that as an experience?

**Will:** [00:57:03] Just just incredible. AGrespect are such a fantastic organization. I mean, I've got to know, I mentioned Matt already, but Matt's one of the founding members. And then through Matt I've, I guess, I've met quite a lot of the others, and many of them have become really good friends. And I've interviewed some on the podcast as well, and some of them have had really powerful stories. And I'm thinking of specifically of a lady called Lydia Lydia Slack, who talked very, very movingly of growing up in a very kind of typical farming community, probably much like you and you and I grew up in Aled and very much feeling that she was different and she was attracted to other women, but she couldn't let anybody know that because of how anyone would react, and she ended up with suicidal thoughts and being very close to it and in her life. And I think if you can listen to a podcast like that and not be, not be moved or have you, maybe if you have got preconceived ideas or if you can not have those changed after listening to that, then you know, I don't know what to say to you because, you know, some of the stories are so powerful and AGrespect is just such a brilliant organization and it's a brilliant organization in two regards. One, It's giving people LGBTQ people in the countryside, and there are a lot more than I think people would think. It's given them a chance to to tell their story and to get together with like minded people and express who they are, which is, you know, in this very divided times we're living in is an incredible thing, but also. Well, I'm so impressed by what I was so impressed by on Saturday, we got off the train at New Street and I took my wife and the girls as well, and we walked from New Street up to Queen Square, which is where we met the AGrespect crew. And the the Massey Ferguson or the sassy Ferguson, as it was for the day in the tour of all colors and it was brilliant, was in the middle of Queen Square in Birmingham and it was where the kind of the parade was started from. And people were just going crazy for the tractor, you know, taking pictures with it, selfies, having kids taking pictures with it. You know, and you know, we all try so hard to get out of the farming bubble and to tell the farming story. And I can't think of many people who are doing that better than AGrespect, and we took part in the parade and it was just incredible. You know, people were just going crazy for farmers and, you know, the tractor. And it's quite easy, I think, to get bogged down in farming with all the negative stories in the press are about farming, and you can sort of start to think that the whole world is against us, but you go to something like that and you realize that so many people are supporting us, but it's just up to us perhaps. Maybe just get out of a comfort zone a little bit and take the story to them rather than waiting for them to come to us, and it was just amazing and you know the message, I think the theme of Saturday was stronger together. That was the theme of Birmingham Pride, and it was just incredible. It's had a really big impact on me, really such a big eye opener, just that that sort of feeling of so many people from different faiths and skin colors and cultures and backgrounds and sexualities, all just having a drink and a dance and having a good time and you know, as I say in this very sort of divided time God who who can't get behind something like that. And it was just amazing. And my my daughters loved it. They had a brilliant time. Everybody made a big fuss over them. It was great.

**Aled:** [01:01:04] Yeah, I've seen the pictures on your social media and yeah, clearly your family had a fantastic time and it's an experience that they're going to remember for quite some time. I'm sure you're going to get involved with many more seeing as enjoyed it so much and it's such an important thing.

**Will:** [01:01:19] Honestly, I'm well, there was a guy marching behind us who was, you know, there was all kinds of people dressed in all kinds of very flamboyant costumes and, you know, right down to sort of middle aged dads like me and very towards, you know, traditional clothes. But you know, there was a guy marching in the parade just behind us who was in just a pair of very tight pants and nothing else. So I am I do now get to threaten the girls that if they don't behave themselves for the next 12 months, that's what I'll do.

**Aled:** [01:01:48] Dad's going to wear those pants.

**Will:** [01:01:50] So I've got that bargaining chip in my favour now.

**Aled:** [01:01:54] Would you post that picture on Twitter? That's the question.

**Will:** [01:01:56] I don't know. I wouldn't want to give too many people nightmares. I don't. I'm threatening them with some hot pants and sequins for next year.

**Aled:** [01:02:06] Oh, fantastic. Well, well, that past hour or so was just flown by. I don't know where the time has gone. We've covered a lot of ground, but there is one final question that I must ask you. I did forewarn you before we started recording and he said, Oh my God, that's a big question. But but it is a question we've been asking several of our guests this year, and that is what's your definition of a successful farmer?

**Will:** [01:02:31] So I'll keep it quite simple, and I think I would say, and I would count myself in this as well, and this very much goes for me. A successful farmer is a happy farmer, and I don't mean that to sound trite or cheesy. But you know, if you if you were happy with your life and you happy with your farm and you're happy with your business and you're feeling good about it, then I think that makes you pretty successful in my book so yeah, short answer to a big question a successful farmer is Happy farmer, I think, and whatever your definition of happiness is, probably makes you successful.

**Aled:** [01:03:11] Well, I couldn't agree more. What a wonderful way to end this podcast episode. Will Penri Evans. Diolch o galon. Thank you ever so much.

**Will:** [01:03:20] Diolch Aled. Thank you so much for having me on.

**Aled:** [01:03:24] If you would like more information about the support available through Farming Connect, then please contact your local development officer or the Service Center on 08456000813. And there we are, we've reached the end of yet another episode. We'll be back in two weeks time with plenty more to talk about. But in the meantime, don't forget to hit subscribe on whichever platform you use to keep notified of all new episodes of Ear to the Ground. So on behalf of the team at Farming Connect and myself Aled Jones, thank you for listening and goodbye for now. Pob hwyl i chi.