1

00:00:00,670 --> 00:00:04,030

[Music]

2

00:00:02,000 --> 00:00:10,480

[Music]

3

00:00:04,030 --> 00:00:13,759

[Music]

4

00:00:10,480 --> 00:00:15,759

Hello, and welcome to episode 62 of Ear

5

00:00:13,759 --> 00:00:18,160

to the Ground. a podcast brought to you

6

00:00:15,759 --> 00:00:20,800

by Farming Connect, supporting Welsh

7

00:00:18,160 --> 00:00:23,039

farmers to adapt and thrive.

8

00:00:20,800 --> 00:00:25,359

With the potato planting season well

9

00:00:23,039 --> 00:00:28,240

underway in Pembrokeshire, we caught up

10

00:00:25,359 --> 00:00:30,640

with Euros Davies - a relative newcomer to

11

00:00:28,240 --> 00:00:32,480

the business of growing potatoes. On his

12

00:00:30,640 --> 00:00:35,120

family's block of land near Milford

13

00:00:32,480 --> 00:00:37,120

Haven, he's been busy planting potatoes

14

00:00:35,120 --> 00:00:39,760

ready for sale and marketing through

15

00:00:37,120 --> 00:00:41,760

Puffin Produce. In this podcast, he talks

16

00:00:39,760 --> 00:00:44,320

about what it takes to establish a

17

00:00:41,760 --> 00:00:46,320

successful crop, and how working in

18

00:00:44,320 --> 00:00:48,719

collaboration with fellow growers can

19

00:00:46,320 --> 00:00:49,760

reduce the cost burden of buying new

20

00:00:48,719 --> 00:00:51,600

equipment.

21

00:00:49,760 --> 00:00:53,520

Here's Euros in the planting field,

22

00:00:51,600 --> 00:00:56,000

describing what's going on and the

23

00:00:53,520 --> 00:00:58,320

surrounding landscape.

24

00:00:56,000 --> 00:01:00,960

We're in here with the Bransons in a farm that

25

00:00:58,320 --> 00:01:03,600

my father probably bought 20 years ago.

26

00:01:00,960 --> 00:01:05,519

In front of us here, the bed tiller

27

00:01:03,600 --> 00:01:07,520

is going up and down

28

00:01:05,519 --> 00:01:09,119

cultivating the beds after the ridger,

29

00:01:07,520 --> 00:01:10,560

and the destoner is also going up and

30

00:01:09,119 --> 00:01:12,799

down here, as well.

31

00:01:10,560 --> 00:01:14,320

You can see the chicken sheds in the

32

00:01:12,799 --> 00:01:15,840

background there; there's a

33

00:01:14,320 --> 00:01:17,840

mixture of stuff around here. You can see

34

00:01:15,840 --> 00:01:19,520

the chicken sheds, you can see sheep, you

35

00:01:17,840 --> 00:01:22,560

can see silage being done up on the hill

36

00:01:19,520 --> 00:01:24,320

over there - so there's a large mixture of

37

00:01:22,560 --> 00:01:27,200

stuff going on around here. There's

38

00:01:24,320 --> 00:01:28,479

a real variety of farming types and

39

00:01:27,200 --> 00:01:30,159

farming operations. And what's

40

00:01:28,479 --> 00:01:31,840

interesting is, the field we're stood on,

41

00:01:30,159 --> 00:01:33,439

and we're looking over

42

00:01:31,840 --> 00:01:36,400

at the operations behind us - it's the

43

00:01:33,439 --> 00:01:38,240

first time you've planted potatoes on

44

00:01:36,400 --> 00:01:39,920

this block. Maybe it's had potatoes many,

45

00:01:38,240 --> 00:01:42,000

many years ago, but not for at least

46

00:01:39,920 --> 00:01:44,159

20 years or more. No. These have never

47

00:01:42,000 --> 00:01:46,479

had potatoes with us. These fields

48

00:01:44,159 --> 00:01:48,640

have never actually been ploughed

49

00:01:46,479 --> 00:01:50,479

with us either. These are all just

50

00:01:48,640 --> 00:01:52,320

worked up with a Sumo, and

51

00:01:50,479 --> 00:01:54,240

not even ploughed. It's fresh

52

00:01:52,320 --> 00:01:55,840

ground, so it should grow nice potatoes.

53

00:01:54,240 --> 00:01:57,840

And that's a good sign.

54

00:01:55,840 --> 00:01:59,680

Potatoes will grow better in

55

00:01:57,840 --> 00:02:01,520

ground that hasn't grown potatoes for a

56

00:01:59,680 --> 00:02:02,960

long, long time. Yes. The skin and

57

00:02:01,520 --> 00:02:06,079

finish will be better; there will be no

58

00:02:02,960 --> 00:02:07,840

disease from past potatoes, and

59

00:02:06,079 --> 00:02:10,160

they will store better; they store for

60

00:02:07,840 --> 00:02:12,800

longer when it’s fresh ground, as well.

61

00:02:10,160 --> 00:02:15,520

Now, you're a dairy farmer son.

62

00:02:12,800 --> 00:02:17,760

Obviously back home, you're

63

00:02:15,520 --> 00:02:19,280

milking cows, but you've got more

64

00:02:17,760 --> 00:02:21,920

interest probably in the

65

00:02:19,280 --> 00:02:23,760

the machinery side of the business? Tell

66

00:02:21,920 --> 00:02:26,239

us a bit more about that.

67

00:02:23,760 --> 00:02:27,840

To be fair, I like a mixture of it all.

68

00:02:26,239 --> 00:02:29,760

69

00:02:27,840 --> 00:02:31,920

When I left school, I did a lot of

70

00:02:29,760 --> 00:02:34,239

contracting. I helped a lot of potato

71

00:02:31,920 --> 00:02:35,840

farmers and stuff like that, and I

72

00:02:34,239 --> 00:02:37,200

thought, “Well, why can't I do this on our

73

00:02:35,840 --> 00:02:39,280

land, and

74

00:02:37,200 --> 00:02:40,480

include it in our rotation, because it

75

00:02:39,280 --> 00:02:43,120

does work?”

76

00:02:40,480 --> 00:02:44,879

We went at it and

77

00:02:43,120 --> 00:02:47,440

thought, “Why can't we grow potatoes on our own

78

00:02:44,879 --> 00:02:49,200

land?” – and here we are! You're in

79

00:02:47,440 --> 00:02:51,440

an area where there is a lot of

80

00:02:49,200 --> 00:02:53,680

crop growing and potato growing

81

00:02:51,440 --> 00:02:55,840

alongside livestock farming. We

82

00:02:53,680 --> 00:02:57,440

grow a lot of wheat, barley, and we've got

83

00:02:55,840 --> 00:02:59,040

oil seed rape, and obviously grass for

84

00:02:57,440 --> 00:03:00,640

the cows, and now

85

00:02:59,040 --> 00:03:01,680

we’ve included spuds.

86

00:03:00,640 --> 00:03:03,440

87

00:03:01,680 --> 00:03:05,440

How much

88

00:03:03,440 --> 00:03:06,959

research did you have to do into potato growing

89

00:03:05,440 --> 00:03:08,720

before starting? You had worked on some

90

00:03:06,959 --> 00:03:10,159

other potato farms, and so you were fairly

91

00:03:08,720 --> 00:03:12,239

confident.

92

00:03:10,159 --> 00:03:14,000

Yes, I was really confident. I was doing

93

00:03:12,239 --> 00:03:16,159

a lot with a couple of growers that have

94

00:03:14,000 --> 00:03:18,400

been at it for a long time,

95

00:03:16,159 --> 00:03:20,800

so I’ve kind of seen how it should be done,

96

00:03:18,400 --> 00:03:23,680

if you know what I mean? I did

97

00:03:20,800 --> 00:03:26,239

some research on different

98

00:03:23,680 --> 00:03:29,200

different seed potatoes and what would

99

00:03:26,239 --> 00:03:32,080

work best for us maybe. But apart

100

00:03:29,200 --> 00:03:33,519

from that, I was quite confident that I

101

00:03:32,080 --> 00:03:34,879

could do the job.

102

00:03:33,519 --> 00:03:37,200

What type of seed potatoes are you

103

00:03:34,879 --> 00:03:39,200

planting here? In this field, there's

104

00:03:37,200 --> 00:03:41,440

Orla going in here.

105

00:03:39,200 --> 00:03:43,360

They'll be sold probably next year.

106

00:03:41,440 --> 00:03:44,879

The main crop will be baker

107

00:03:43,360 --> 00:03:48,640

potatoes,

108

00:03:44,879 --> 00:03:50,720

so they'll be in long storage.

109

00:03:48,640 --> 00:03:52,319

The crop you'll be harvesting

110

00:03:50,720 --> 00:03:54,319

this year probably won't get sold on the

111

00:03:52,319 --> 00:03:55,439

supermarket shelves until sometime

112

00:03:54,319 --> 00:03:57,519

next year?

113

00:03:55,439 --> 00:03:59,680

Yes. Last year's crop has not

114

00:03:57,519 --> 00:04:01,439

long been selling on the shelves now,

115

00:03:59,680 --> 00:04:02,799

116

00:04:01,439 --> 00:04:04,640

and I don't think it's all finished yet,

117

00:04:02,799 --> 00:04:06,159

either - I think they're still using it.

118

00:04:04,640 --> 00:04:07,040

119

00:04:06,159 --> 00:04:08,799

120

00:04:07,040 --> 00:04:11,120

Tell us about the operations you've

121

00:04:08,799 --> 00:04:12,720

got to do to the ground in terms of

122

00:04:11,120 --> 00:04:14,720

getting ready to plant the potatoes.

123

00:04:12,720 --> 00:04:17,359

We’re stood in this field and we see

124

00:04:14,720 --> 00:04:19,759

that there are three tractors here with

125

00:04:17,359 --> 00:04:21,519

different implements on the back of them.

126

00:04:19,759 --> 00:04:23,440

Talk us through the process - where do you

127

00:04:21,519 --> 00:04:25,360

start? This is the min-till style

128

00:04:23,440 --> 00:04:26,400

operation. There's no plough used

129

00:04:25,360 --> 00:04:28,320

here.

130

00:04:26,400 --> 00:04:30,400

We start in the autumn. There was wheat

131

00:04:28,320 --> 00:04:32,240

in these fields last year, so we put a

132

00:04:30,400 --> 00:04:34,240

cover crop in. There was vetch and rye in

133

00:04:32,240 --> 00:04:35,680

these fields last year

134

00:04:34,240 --> 00:04:37,520

in the autumn,

135

00:04:35,680 --> 00:04:39,840

and we grazed that over the winter with

136

00:04:37,520 --> 00:04:44,000

sheep. We didn't graze it too hard - tried not

137

00:04:39,840 --> 00:04:45,360

to poach it, and then we sprayed that off

138

00:04:44,000 --> 00:04:47,040

in the spring,

139

00:04:45,360 --> 00:04:49,040

probably about three weeks before we

140

00:04:47,040 --> 00:04:51,600

went to do anything with it. Then we go

141

00:04:49,040 --> 00:04:52,960

through with the Sumo then, which has got

142

00:04:51,600 --> 00:04:54,160

six

143

00:04:52,960 --> 00:04:56,320

aggressive

144

00:04:54,160 --> 00:04:58,000

legs on it which lifts the soil, and it's

145

00:04:56,320 --> 00:05:00,560

got discs on it as well, and that chops

146

00:04:58,000 --> 00:05:02,880

it up as well, and we find that

147

00:05:00,560 --> 00:05:05,600

enough after the cover crop as

148

00:05:02,880 --> 00:05:07,120

the roots have gone down and

149

00:05:05,600 --> 00:05:08,080

they've opened it up already, kind of

150

00:05:07,120 --> 00:05:09,440

thing.

151

00:05:08,080 --> 00:05:11,520

We just go through once with that

152

00:05:09,440 --> 00:05:12,720

machine, and then go straight in with a

153

00:05:11,520 --> 00:05:14,240

ridger

154

00:05:12,720 --> 00:05:16,479

to create these bridges that we can see

155

00:05:14,240 --> 00:05:18,000

behind us, and then

156

00:05:16,479 --> 00:05:20,639

the bed tiller goes through, which is

157

00:05:18,000 --> 00:05:22,479

basically a rotovator with blades,

158

00:05:20,639 --> 00:05:24,400

and it's got a ridger on the back and

159

00:05:22,479 --> 00:05:26,240

that puddles it back up, and then the

160

00:05:24,400 --> 00:05:28,960

destoner comes through and

161

00:05:26,240 --> 00:05:31,199

puts the stones along in the trench,

162

00:05:28,960 --> 00:05:33,520

and then we've got a nice bed with

163

00:05:31,199 --> 00:05:36,400

about 14 inches of soil, and

164

00:05:33,520 --> 00:05:38,080

we go into that with a planter, and

165

00:05:36,400 --> 00:05:40,800

depending on what size they are, plant

166

00:05:38,080 --> 00:05:42,160

them 7/8 inches deep in that bed,

167

00:05:40,800 --> 00:05:44,800

and then they've obviously got that

168

00:05:42,160 --> 00:05:46,240

below them as well, then, of course.

169

00:05:44,800 --> 00:05:47,759

170

00:05:46,240 --> 00:05:49,840

By doing it like this, I think we keep a

171

00:05:47,759 --> 00:05:53,120

lot of moisture in the soil.

172

00:05:49,840 --> 00:05:55,199

Soils are a lot healthier, and it's better on

173

00:05:53,120 --> 00:05:57,280

fuel (ploughing and stuff takes a lot of

174

00:05:55,199 --> 00:05:59,039

fuel).

175

00:05:57,280 --> 00:06:00,240

I think it's a lot more economical way

176

00:05:59,039 --> 00:06:02,080

of planting.

177

00:06:00,240 --> 00:06:03,280

It doesn't always work,

178

00:06:02,080 --> 00:06:05,360

but

179

00:06:03,280 --> 00:06:06,880

with our cover cropping and

180

00:06:05,360 --> 00:06:07,840

the way we are doing it, it does seem

181

00:06:06,880 --> 00:06:09,039

to work.

182

00:06:07,840 --> 00:06:11,919

Obviously, you've got to keep an eye

183

00:06:09,039 --> 00:06:13,919

on the weather, so ideally dry weather

184

00:06:11,919 --> 00:06:15,120

for these operations? I wouldn't

185

00:06:13,919 --> 00:06:18,479

really want

186

00:06:15,120 --> 00:06:20,080

rain after the destoner and before planting.

187

00:06:18,479 --> 00:06:22,720

If it was going to rain tonight,

188

00:06:20,080 --> 00:06:25,360

I'd be up right behind the destoner, and

189

00:06:22,720 --> 00:06:28,000

we wouldn't be leaving any

190

00:06:25,360 --> 00:06:29,199

not planted. Obviously,

191

00:06:28,000 --> 00:06:32,639

you want a drop of rain after you’ve

192

00:06:29,199 --> 00:06:34,720

planted? Yes, we need some rain after it.

193

00:06:32,639 --> 00:06:36,319

Have there been instances in the

194

00:06:34,720 --> 00:06:38,080

last few years when it’s been dry

195

00:06:36,319 --> 00:06:40,479

summers and you've had to irrigate or

196

00:06:38,080 --> 00:06:42,080

bring water in? These spuds that

197

00:06:40,479 --> 00:06:44,160

we're growing, they don't tend to need

198

00:06:42,080 --> 00:06:46,800

irrigation; they can deal with

199

00:06:44,160 --> 00:06:49,840

quite dry weather - you just get a little bit less

200

00:06:46,800 --> 00:06:52,080

yield, and so that's why we go for these

201

00:06:49,840 --> 00:06:53,440

types, because we haven't got irrigation

202

00:06:52,080 --> 00:06:54,800

ponds, and

203

00:06:53,440 --> 00:06:56,560

quite often in the middle of the summer,

204

00:06:54,800 --> 00:06:58,000

we're busy baling and on the silage and

205

00:06:56,560 --> 00:07:00,639

stuff, so we don't want to be irrigating

206

00:06:58,000 --> 00:07:02,720

all summer as well.

207

00:07:00,639 --> 00:07:04,960

We try and go for varieties that we

208

00:07:02,720 --> 00:07:06,639

don't have to irrigate.

209

00:07:04,960 --> 00:07:09,360

Because you sell your

210

00:07:06,639 --> 00:07:11,440

potatoes to Puffin, Puffin has an

211

00:07:09,360 --> 00:07:13,680

interest in what varieties you plant.

212

00:07:11,440 --> 00:07:15,599

How closely do they work with you

213

00:07:13,680 --> 00:07:17,840

from a seed to potato point of view, and

214

00:07:15,599 --> 00:07:19,039

from an agronomy point of view?

215

00:07:17,840 --> 00:07:20,479

Of course, we've obviously got to grow

216

00:07:19,039 --> 00:07:22,720

something that they can sell at the end

217

00:07:20,479 --> 00:07:25,280

of the day; they need to tell us what

218

00:07:22,720 --> 00:07:27,759

to grow so they can sell it.

219

00:07:25,280 --> 00:07:29,520

We obviously work with them, and

220

00:07:27,759 --> 00:07:31,199

they sell a lot of Orla, and

221

00:07:29,520 --> 00:07:33,440

that's what we grow for them. We've

222

00:07:31,199 --> 00:07:34,720

actually got some Sunita going in this

223

00:07:33,440 --> 00:07:36,720

year as well,

224

00:07:34,720 --> 00:07:38,240

which is the first for us.

225

00:07:36,720 --> 00:07:40,479

They definitely have a say in

226

00:07:38,240 --> 00:07:42,840

what we plant because they need to sell

227

00:07:40,479 --> 00:07:44,800

it. And that’s driven by

228

00:07:42,840 --> 00:07:46,720

consumers’ habits, and

229

00:07:44,800 --> 00:07:49,680

they sell a lot under their very famous

230

00:07:46,720 --> 00:07:51,680

Blas y Tir brand. And I guess what

231

00:07:49,680 --> 00:07:54,080

sells well on the supermarket shelves is a

232

00:07:51,680 --> 00:07:57,440

smaller sized potato

233

00:07:54,080 --> 00:07:59,280

in bags. Yes, I suppose.

234

00:07:57,440 --> 00:08:01,280

They do all

235

00:07:59,280 --> 00:08:02,800

different sizes, and they grade them all out

236

00:08:01,280 --> 00:08:06,000

and do the

237

00:08:02,800 --> 00:08:08,000

bakers, the larger ones, at 80mm, down to

238

00:08:06,000 --> 00:08:09,840

the smaller ones at 40mm.

239

00:08:08,000 --> 00:08:11,520

240

00:08:09,840 --> 00:08:14,160

The Blas y Tir brand is quite

241

00:08:11,520 --> 00:08:17,120

well-known - all Welsh

242

00:08:14,160 --> 00:08:18,879

produce.

243

00:08:17,120 --> 00:08:21,120

And when you get nearer to harvesting,

244

00:08:18,879 --> 00:08:23,199

they'll come out and

245

00:08:21,120 --> 00:08:26,639

dig up a sample and tell you when is the

246

00:08:23,199 --> 00:08:28,319

optimum time to harvest? Yes. We

247

00:08:26,639 --> 00:08:31,120

all do it together really. We'll dig some

248

00:08:28,319 --> 00:08:32,640

up so, a square plot,

249

00:08:31,120 --> 00:08:34,080

and size them all up, because you don't

250

00:08:32,640 --> 00:08:36,560

want them to be too big, because after

251

00:08:34,080 --> 00:08:38,839

about 85mm, the factory can't really

252

00:08:36,560 --> 00:08:41,360

handle them, and they just get a bit big

253

00:08:38,839 --> 00:08:43,680

then.

254

00:08:41,360 --> 00:08:46,080

We aim to burn them off before they

255

00:08:43,680 --> 00:08:48,959

get to that size really. And

256

00:08:46,080 --> 00:08:51,440

you harvest, and they are put into containers

257

00:08:48,959 --> 00:08:54,160

and boxes. Yes, potato boxes; they go straight

258

00:08:51,440 --> 00:08:56,480

into potato boxes from the harvester, and

259

00:08:54,160 --> 00:08:58,800

those boxes go straight to Puffin.

260

00:08:56,480 --> 00:09:01,360

And then Puffing is only about 10 miles

261

00:08:58,800 --> 00:09:04,320

away. Not even that - about five

262

00:09:01,360 --> 00:09:06,240

or six miles away.

263

00:09:04,320 --> 00:09:08,640

Once they arrive at Puffin, they get

264

00:09:06,240 --> 00:09:10,640

graded first or weighed?

265

00:09:08,640 --> 00:09:13,279

They just get weighed, and they are given

266

00:09:10,640 --> 00:09:14,880

a load number and they've got record of

267

00:09:13,279 --> 00:09:16,720

what field it is,

268

00:09:14,880 --> 00:09:19,600

and every load has a number. They

269

00:09:16,720 --> 00:09:21,440

quality-control every load, and take

270

00:09:19,600 --> 00:09:24,160

a sample out of every load,

271

00:09:21,440 --> 00:09:25,360

give it a quality score

272

00:09:24,160 --> 00:09:27,040

so that they know what they've got in

273

00:09:25,360 --> 00:09:28,720

their stores, and then they'll go into

274

00:09:27,040 --> 00:09:31,440

storage, then.

275

00:09:28,720 --> 00:09:32,959

When do you get paid for the crop?

276

00:09:31,440 --> 00:09:34,080

About 30 days after it's

277

00:09:32,959 --> 00:09:35,920

packed.

278

00:09:34,080 --> 00:09:36,959

Right. And it's only packed when it's

279

00:09:35,920 --> 00:09:38,640

nearing

280

00:09:36,959 --> 00:09:40,160

sale?

281

00:09:38,640 --> 00:09:42,240

It's packed when it's going

282

00:09:40,160 --> 00:09:46,320

out. So you might not be paid for

283

00:09:42,240 --> 00:09:48,560

this year’s crop until next year?

284

00:09:46,320 --> 00:09:50,720

Yes. You do obviously benefit, because the longer

285

00:09:48,560 --> 00:09:52,080

they keep them in store,

286

00:09:50,720 --> 00:09:54,800

you get a bit more.

287

00:09:52,080 --> 00:09:56,320

I see. If they

288

00:09:54,800 --> 00:09:57,519

do use them later, then you're obviously

289

00:09:56,320 --> 00:09:59,120

waiting.

290

00:09:57,519 --> 00:10:00,240

291

00:09:59,120 --> 00:10:01,600

With these

292

00:10:00,240 --> 00:10:03,360

spuds that we

293

00:10:01,600 --> 00:10:05,120

grow,

294

00:10:03,360 --> 00:10:07,440

they aim to

295

00:10:05,120 --> 00:10:09,680

sell them around February/March/April

296

00:10:07,440 --> 00:10:11,600

most of the time. They're

297

00:10:09,680 --> 00:10:12,320

still using them now.

298

00:10:11,600 --> 00:10:13,519

But

299

00:10:12,320 --> 00:10:15,279

the

300

00:10:13,519 --> 00:10:16,480

first year is hard, but once

301

00:10:15,279 --> 00:10:17,440

you're into it,

302

00:10:16,480 --> 00:10:19,279

303

00:10:17,440 --> 00:10:21,600

it's not too bad. Once

304

00:10:19,279 --> 00:10:24,000

you've planted in this field this year,

305

00:10:21,600 --> 00:10:25,760

you won't realistically want to plant

306

00:10:24,000 --> 00:10:28,000

potatoes here for another four or five

307

00:10:25,760 --> 00:10:30,320

years? No. We won’t plant in this field

308

00:10:28,000 --> 00:10:33,519

for at least another five years, probably.

309

00:10:30,320 --> 00:10:35,040

We've got a big rotation of land.

310

00:10:33,519 --> 00:10:38,320

So you need a lot of land really to have

311

00:10:35,040 --> 00:10:39,680

a sizeable crop each year? Yes.

312

00:10:38,320 --> 00:10:41,839

313

00:10:39,680 --> 00:10:43,839

There's about 70 acres

314

00:10:41,839 --> 00:10:45,040

going be in this block this year.

315

00:10:43,839 --> 00:10:48,320

Obviously, we won't be able

316

00:10:45,040 --> 00:10:49,920

to use this 70-acre block again.

317

00:10:48,320 --> 00:10:51,120

We've stepped up a little bit again

318

00:10:49,920 --> 00:10:53,519

this year.

319

00:10:51,120 --> 00:10:55,839

You share equipment with

320

00:10:53,519 --> 00:10:59,440

a nearby farmer and a friend – Tom.

321

00:10:55,839 --> 00:11:01,839

The tractor and the destoner here, Tom owns.

322

00:10:59,440 --> 00:11:03,920

We contract him in

323

00:11:01,839 --> 00:11:06,160

to do our destoning, and then he

324

00:11:03,920 --> 00:11:08,240

contracts us in to do his bed tilling,

325

00:11:06,160 --> 00:11:10,240

planting and harvesting.

326

00:11:08,240 --> 00:11:12,240

We don't actually half-

327

00:11:10,240 --> 00:11:14,720

own anything - we just contract each

328

00:11:12,240 --> 00:11:16,560

other, and we find it works well.

329

00:11:14,720 --> 00:11:17,600

I get his tractor, driver and

330

00:11:16,560 --> 00:11:19,200

machine,

331

00:11:17,600 --> 00:11:21,040

and he gets our tractors, drivers and

332

00:11:19,200 --> 00:11:22,880

machines, and we haven't got to buy any

333

00:11:21,040 --> 00:11:24,320

extra kit. It is an expensive

334

00:11:22,880 --> 00:11:26,720

thing to establish - buying all the

335

00:11:24,320 --> 00:11:28,480

equipment. To start potato farming

336

00:11:26,720 --> 00:11:30,399

is expensive, so if you can work

337

00:11:28,480 --> 00:11:32,480

together, it does make it

338

00:11:30,399 --> 00:11:34,399

more achievable for both of you.

339

00:11:32,480 --> 00:11:35,200

Definitely. It does work if you can work

340

00:11:34,399 --> 00:11:36,880

it out.

341

00:11:35,200 --> 00:11:39,200

342

00:11:36,880 --> 00:11:41,360

Those machines are all expensive, and the

343

00:11:39,200 --> 00:11:43,839

tractors on the front and the driver on

344

00:11:41,360 --> 00:11:46,000

the seat - that's all

345

00:11:43,839 --> 00:11:47,600

expensive. And those people working with

346

00:11:46,000 --> 00:11:49,600

you, are they local?

347

00:11:47,600 --> 00:11:51,760

Yes, everyone's local.

348

00:11:49,600 --> 00:11:52,880

349

00:11:51,760 --> 00:11:53,920

350

00:11:52,880 --> 00:11:58,079

And there's something about the

351

00:11:53,920 --> 00:12:00,959

precision of crop growing that you like?

352

00:11:58,079 --> 00:12:02,959

Yes. All these beds

353

00:12:00,959 --> 00:12:05,200

were done on

354

00:12:02,959 --> 00:12:06,880

RTK signal on the tractor, so it’s all

355

00:12:05,200 --> 00:12:08,079

done by precision.

356

00:12:06,880 --> 00:12:09,600

The

357

00:12:08,079 --> 00:12:12,160

middle of these fields were all marked

358

00:12:09,600 --> 00:12:13,920

out by GPS,

359

00:12:12,160 --> 00:12:15,440

so that we can plant the centres first

360

00:12:13,920 --> 00:12:17,760

and then we come back and plant the

361

00:12:15,440 --> 00:12:21,360

headlands afterwards - so it's all marked

362

00:12:17,760 --> 00:12:23,519

out by GPS on the tractor.

363

00:12:21,360 --> 00:12:25,360

All the rows will be exactly the right width

364

00:12:23,519 --> 00:12:27,150

and

365

00:12:25,360 --> 00:12:30,959

nice and straight, or meant to be, anyway!

366

00:12:27,150 --> 00:12:32,880

[Laughter]

367

00:12:30,959 --> 00:12:35,920

Next year, what will you plant in this

368

00:12:32,880 --> 00:12:38,320

field? These will come out in

369

00:12:35,920 --> 00:12:39,600

August/September, and then a

370

00:12:38,320 --> 00:12:41,920

crop of first wheat will go in this

371

00:12:39,600 --> 00:12:44,000

field, then. This will all get

372

00:12:41,920 --> 00:12:46,240

ripped back up with that machine again,

373

00:12:44,000 --> 00:12:47,839

and we'll plant wheat in here.

374

00:12:46,240 --> 00:12:49,040

It'll do well after the potatoes,

375

00:12:47,839 --> 00:12:51,200

because there will be

376

00:12:49,040 --> 00:12:52,560

fertiliser left in the soil. And

377

00:12:51,200 --> 00:12:54,720

that'll be good for the crop.

378

00:12:52,560 --> 00:12:57,120

Wheat always does well after the crop has

379

00:12:54,720 --> 00:12:59,120

spread. How much of an impact

380

00:12:57,120 --> 00:13:01,120

has the increase in fertiliser prices

381

00:12:59,120 --> 00:13:02,399

and general input costs had on you?

382

00:13:01,120 --> 00:13:04,320

The fuel

383

00:13:02,399 --> 00:13:06,079

price and the fertiliser price is

384

00:13:04,320 --> 00:13:09,279

massive because obviously on this job we

385

00:13:06,079 --> 00:13:10,480

use a lot of diesel and a lot fertiliser,

386

00:13:09,279 --> 00:13:13,519

so

387

00:13:10,480 --> 00:13:15,040

it has impacted us a lot.

388

00:13:13,519 --> 00:13:18,079

What about the price you get for

389

00:13:15,040 --> 00:13:20,160

potatoes? Will that go up? We are in

390

00:13:18,079 --> 00:13:22,160

talks with them. They are quite fair. We

391

00:13:20,160 --> 00:13:25,120

are going to have more this year, but it’s

392

00:13:22,160 --> 00:13:27,519

not 100% -

393

00:13:25,120 --> 00:13:29,920

we're still in talks, but they are

394

00:13:27,519 --> 00:13:31,120

quite fair.

395

00:13:29,920 --> 00:13:33,680

396

00:13:31,120 --> 00:13:35,680

Do you work together as a body of

397

00:13:33,680 --> 00:13:37,360

growers to work with Puffin?

398

00:13:35,680 --> 00:13:38,320

Obviously, Puffin was a cooperative

399

00:13:37,360 --> 00:13:40,560

style

400

00:13:38,320 --> 00:13:42,480

company. I think they value

401

00:13:40,560 --> 00:13:43,680

as well that they've got to have

402

00:13:42,480 --> 00:13:45,040

the growers otherwise they haven't got a

403

00:13:43,680 --> 00:13:47,120

product, and that's what their business

404

00:13:45,040 --> 00:13:48,399

is, at the end of the day. They

405

00:13:47,120 --> 00:13:50,320

understand they've got to talk to the

406

00:13:48,399 --> 00:13:51,920

farmers, and they do talk to the

407

00:13:50,320 --> 00:13:53,440

farmers,

408

00:13:51,920 --> 00:13:55,440

and

409

00:13:53,440 --> 00:13:56,959

they are quite fair. It's a close

410

00:13:55,440 --> 00:13:58,320

relationship, and

411

00:13:56,959 --> 00:14:00,399

they take a keen interest in

412

00:13:58,320 --> 00:14:02,079

understanding how the crops are doing so

413

00:14:00,399 --> 00:14:02,880

they can plan their business.

414

00:14:02,079 --> 00:14:04,160

415

00:14:02,880 --> 00:14:05,760

The nice thing about it is,

416

00:14:04,160 --> 00:14:07,839

you've got a sense that you’re

417

00:14:05,760 --> 00:14:09,600

quite close to the consumer, and you're

418

00:14:07,839 --> 00:14:11,519

growing something that you know has a market,

419

00:14:09,600 --> 00:14:13,600

and the

420

00:14:11,519 --> 00:14:15,360

information goes up and down that supply

421

00:14:13,600 --> 00:14:17,360

chain.

422

00:14:15,360 --> 00:14:19,519

What does the future hold?

423

00:14:17,360 --> 00:14:22,000

We've grown in acres a couple of times.

424

00:14:19,519 --> 00:14:24,240

This is our third year. The

425

00:14:22,000 --> 00:14:25,920

first year, we were 40 something, I think, and

426

00:14:24,240 --> 00:14:27,920

second year, we were

427

00:14:25,920 --> 00:14:29,760

50 something, and this year we nearly

428

00:14:27,920 --> 00:14:32,480

touching 70 acres,

429

00:14:29,760 --> 00:14:34,320

so probably just a little bit more.

430

00:14:32,480 --> 00:14:36,320

The target is maybe 100 acres a year,

431

00:14:34,320 --> 00:14:38,959

depending on what

432

00:14:36,320 --> 00:14:40,560

land we can get hold of, I suppose, but

433

00:14:38,959 --> 00:14:42,079

434

00:14:40,560 --> 00:14:44,720

probably about 100 acres a year. I don't

435

00:14:42,079 --> 00:14:48,399

know if I would want to go a lot more, but it would

436

00:14:44,720 --> 00:14:50,560

be quite comfortable with what we've got.

437

00:14:48,399 --> 00:14:52,560

For anybody listening and thinking about

438

00:14:50,560 --> 00:14:53,920

possibly planting some potatoes on a

439

00:14:52,560 --> 00:14:55,680

commercial scale, what would be your

440

00:14:53,920 --> 00:14:57,040

advice to them, or

441

00:14:55,680 --> 00:14:58,560

what things do they need to consider, and

442

00:14:57,040 --> 00:15:01,040

assessing have they got the right soil,

443

00:14:58,560 --> 00:15:03,760

have they got the right equipment, and so on?

444

00:15:01,040 --> 00:15:05,680

You need a lot of depth of soil.

445

00:15:03,760 --> 00:15:07,199

446

00:15:05,680 --> 00:15:10,160

It's not that easy - a lot of

447

00:15:07,199 --> 00:15:12,720

attention to detail goes into it,

448

00:15:10,160 --> 00:15:14,959

a lot of cost that goes into it,

449

00:15:12,720 --> 00:15:14,959

but

450

00:15:15,040 --> 00:15:19,279

I just like growing crops and stuff, so

451

00:15:16,800 --> 00:15:21,279

it suits me well, and we've got good

452

00:15:19,279 --> 00:15:23,279

depth of soils and stuff on the farm, so

453

00:15:21,279 --> 00:15:24,639

we're okay.

454

00:15:23,279 --> 00:15:27,279

It's

455

00:15:24,639 --> 00:15:29,120

not an easy thing to do,

456

00:15:27,279 --> 00:15:31,040

and if you do it

457

00:15:29,120 --> 00:15:32,399

wrong, it's very expensive.

458

00:15:31,040 --> 00:15:34,079

459

00:15:32,399 --> 00:15:36,160

I guess what's good in your

460

00:15:34,079 --> 00:15:38,000

instance is, you've got that balance

461

00:15:36,160 --> 00:15:39,279

between different operations - you've got

462

00:15:38,000 --> 00:15:40,880

the dairy farming, you've got the

463

00:15:39,279 --> 00:15:42,720

Limousin cattle, you've got the crops,

464

00:15:40,880 --> 00:15:45,040

you've got the potatoes - you've got

465

00:15:42,720 --> 00:15:46,399

different enterprises, and so you can

466

00:15:45,040 --> 00:15:47,759

spread the risk, in that if there is a bad

467

00:15:46,399 --> 00:15:50,079

year with the harvest one year,

468

00:15:47,759 --> 00:15:51,600

at least you're not too

469

00:15:50,079 --> 00:15:53,440

exposed. And that's why it works well

470

00:15:51,600 --> 00:15:55,040

with the rotation, really, and with

471

00:15:53,440 --> 00:15:58,000

everything else that we've

472

00:15:55,040 --> 00:16:00,639

got going on - the rotation works well.

473

00:15:58,000 --> 00:16:02,880

And in this area generally,

474

00:16:00,639 --> 00:16:05,600

if you wanted to expand and either rent

475

00:16:02,880 --> 00:16:08,560

or buy land, is land

476

00:16:05,600 --> 00:16:12,399

readily available, or is it competitive?

477

00:16:08,560 --> 00:16:14,720

We've got a little bit of rented land. It

478

00:16:12,399 --> 00:16:16,720

probably is quite competitive.

479

00:16:14,720 --> 00:16:18,160

There is not much land available.

480

00:16:16,720 --> 00:16:20,079

There might be a few chances in the near

481

00:16:18,160 --> 00:16:21,759

future, you never know!

482

00:16:20,079 --> 00:16:23,600

What's your view on the

483

00:16:21,759 --> 00:16:25,279

environmental footprint of potato

484

00:16:23,600 --> 00:16:26,880

growing in general?

485

00:16:25,279 --> 00:16:29,120

Puffin has been on the front foot in

486

00:16:26,880 --> 00:16:31,440

developing their Root Zero brand, which

487

00:16:29,120 --> 00:16:33,680

is a net-zero

488

00:16:31,440 --> 00:16:34,959

variety and production system producing

489

00:16:33,680 --> 00:16:36,160

potatoes.

490

00:16:34,959 --> 00:16:38,560

Is that something you're keen to get

491

00:16:36,160 --> 00:16:40,560

involved with? We've started

492

00:16:38,560 --> 00:16:42,160

talking about it and looking at stuff more.

493

00:16:40,560 --> 00:16:44,000

With the cover crop that we put in in the

494

00:16:42,160 --> 00:16:44,800

autumn,

495

00:16:44,000 --> 00:16:46,560

that

496

00:16:44,800 --> 00:16:48,480

takes a lot of carbon and

497

00:16:46,560 --> 00:16:51,360

stuff in, and

498

00:16:48,480 --> 00:16:54,160

the minimum tillage approach to potatoes,

499

00:16:51,360 --> 00:16:56,079

that's obviously a lot better economically -

500

00:16:54,160 --> 00:16:57,440

not ploughing, and

501

00:16:56,079 --> 00:16:59,279

literally just having a cover crop and

502

00:16:57,440 --> 00:17:00,399

going through that once with a machine, and

503

00:16:59,279 --> 00:17:03,040

then

504

00:17:00,399 --> 00:17:05,439

pretty much planting potatoes.

505

00:17:03,040 --> 00:17:06,559

We are obviously going to look at more

506

00:17:05,439 --> 00:17:08,640

stuff like that, because that's the way

507

00:17:06,559 --> 00:17:10,640

it's going,

508

00:17:08,640 --> 00:17:11,919

but I think the way we're doing it now,

509

00:17:10,640 --> 00:17:12,959

510

00:17:11,919 --> 00:17:14,559

511

00:17:12,959 --> 00:17:16,160

it's getting there, if you know what I mean?

512

00:17:14,559 --> 00:17:18,079

And you've got to really

513

00:17:16,160 --> 00:17:19,600

have a thorough understanding of soil

514

00:17:18,079 --> 00:17:21,120

health for this sort of farming system,

515

00:17:19,600 --> 00:17:22,720

and you're talking about the cover crops,

516

00:17:21,120 --> 00:17:24,959

and the deep-rooting nature some of

517

00:17:22,720 --> 00:17:26,959

those just frees up the soil and gets it going.

518

00:17:24,959 --> 00:17:28,319

It definitely does a good

519

00:17:26,959 --> 00:17:31,280

job.

520

00:17:28,319 --> 00:17:32,799

We nearly could not be tilling the

521

00:17:31,280 --> 00:17:34,960

beds, to be honest. We’re ridging up

522

00:17:32,799 --> 00:17:36,559

over there, and it's coming up so nice

523

00:17:34,960 --> 00:17:38,000

that we could nearly just be going into

524

00:17:36,559 --> 00:17:40,400

it with a destoner, but we're just going through it

525

00:17:38,000 --> 00:17:42,080

quickly with the bed tiller just

526

00:17:40,400 --> 00:17:44,720

to

527

00:17:42,080 --> 00:17:47,919

fluff it up a bit really.

528

00:17:44,720 --> 00:17:49,520

I best leave you to get back to

529

00:17:47,919 --> 00:17:50,799

some of the tractor work, taking

530

00:17:49,520 --> 00:17:53,679

advantage of the good weather and fine

531

00:17:50,799 --> 00:17:54,880

weather we've got, and to crack on

532

00:17:53,679 --> 00:17:56,799

with the planting. What are you going to

533

00:17:54,880 --> 00:17:58,240

be doing next? We've got

534

00:17:56,799 --> 00:18:00,160

that field down there we've just finished

535

00:17:58,240 --> 00:18:01,600

planting in the centre of it. I’ll be

536

00:18:00,160 --> 00:18:03,840

going down there with the Sumo now,

537

00:18:01,600 --> 00:18:05,600

just going around the outside

538

00:18:03,840 --> 00:18:06,880

ready to ridge that up, and we'll plant

539

00:18:05,600 --> 00:18:08,400

the headlands in that field, then.

540

00:18:06,880 --> 00:18:09,840

Brilliant. And then

541

00:18:08,400 --> 00:18:11,600

we'll plant the centre of this one and

542

00:18:09,840 --> 00:18:13,440

do the same with this one, and hopefully

543

00:18:11,600 --> 00:18:15,600

we should be finished by tomorrow night.

544

00:18:13,440 --> 00:18:16,960

Now, let's hope for a bumper crop.

545

00:18:15,600 --> 00:18:18,080

Hopefully.

546

00:18:16,960 --> 00:18:19,440

547

00:18:18,080 --> 00:18:21,120

Euros, thank you ever so much for having a chat

548

00:18:19,440 --> 00:18:23,200

with us, and all the best of this year’s

549

00:18:21,120 --> 00:18:25,679

harvest, and I’m sure we’ll speak again soon.

550

00:18:23,200 --> 00:18:25,679

Thank you very

551

00:18:26,840 --> 00:18:31,200

much. If you would like more information

552

00:18:29,440 --> 00:18:33,520

about the support available through

553

00:18:31,200 --> 00:18:35,840

Farming Connect, then please contact your

554

00:18:33,520 --> 00:18:38,880

local development officer or the Service

555

00:18:35,840 --> 00:18:41,360

Centre on 08456 000 813

556

00:18:38,880 --> 00:18:43,120

557

00:18:41,360 --> 00:18:45,760

And there we are, we've reached the end

558

00:18:43,120 --> 00:18:47,760

of yet another episode. We'll be back in

559

00:18:45,760 --> 00:18:50,000

two weeks’ time with plenty more to talk

560

00:18:47,760 --> 00:18:52,240

about, but in the meantime, don't forget

561

00:18:50,000 --> 00:18:54,559

to hit subscribe on whichever platform

562

00:18:52,240 --> 00:18:57,039

you use to keep notified of all new

563

00:18:54,559 --> 00:18:58,799

episodes of Ear to the Ground.

564

00:18:57,039 --> 00:19:01,039

On behalf of the team at Farming

565

00:18:58,799 --> 00:19:02,720

Connect, and myself, Aled Jones, thank you

566

00:19:01,039 --> 00:19:03,790

for listening, and goodbye for now.

567

00:19:02,720 --> 00:19:06,450

568

00:19:03,790 --> 00:19:07,790

[Music]

569

00:19:06,450 --> 00:19:19,790

[Music]

570

00:19:07,790 --> 00:19:19,790

[Music]

571

00:19:22,400 --> 00:19:24,480

[Music]