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**Press Release**

11 August 2021

**Are family farms fit for the future?**

Examining whether family farms are fit for the future, panellists at the recent Oxford Farming Conference (OFC) Bitesize webinar on Thursday 5 August explored their routes to resilience.

The session, which was held in partnership with Nuffield Farming Scholarships, is the first in the new series of Bitesize webinars which will be held each month in the lead up to Conference’s return to a physical event in Oxford in January 2022.

Barbara Bray MBE, OFC Co-Chair, who hosted the event said: “The theme for next year’s Conference is ‘Routes to Resilience’. We chose that topic coming out of the pandemic realising the importance of resilience - how can people be sustainable in their business management and more mentally and emotionally resilient,” said Barbara.

The OFC’s Directors want to use the 2022 event - and the series of intervening 2021 OFC Bitesize webinars - to draw attention to farming’s ‘squeezed middle’ - a plight that faces many family farms.

“Over the coming months, we hope that speakers with interesting perspectives and insights will offer inspiration and help for people navigating their way through the minefield of the increased costs and static incomes faced by the ‘squeezed middle’,” Barbara added.

Joining Barbara on the panel were speakers John Pawsey from Shimpling Park Farms Ltd, Suffolk, England; Jamie McCoy from Gorwel Farm, Bryngwyn, Wales; and, John Martin, Gordonall Farms, Greyabbey, Northern Ireland. Each speaker – all from family farming enterprises – recognised and discussed the unique challenges that come from operating in this complex environment.

Returning to the family farm in 1989, after some time away, John Martin said: “My parents were very open to involving me in the decision making at a very early age and, as a result, I've gained in confidence and experience managing and running our business.

“There was no pressure on myself, nor any of my siblings to come back to the farm. My brother and sister assumed that, as the oldest, I would probably take over the farm, but everyone was fairly relaxed about the situation. I became a managing partner about 25 years ago, but I don’t really remember any discussion around succession around the kitchen table, nor about who was going to take on the farm.”

John highlighted the importance of knowing what everyone can bring to the table for helping to ensure the longevity of a family farm.

“The reality is that nothing lasts forever, and we need to consider continuity within a family farming business. It all comes down to communication and everyone needs to be clear about what’s happening. If discussions happen at an early age, then you avoid awkward scenarios down the line.”

Jamie McCoy runs Gorwel Farm alongside her partner Deian Evans in Bryngwyn, West Wales. She focused on the importance of mental resilience in family farming.

“The modern family farm requires highly skilled and multiskilled people to not just survive but to thrive.

“Resilience means different things to different people, but for me it’s all about being able to recover quickly during the tough times. Mental resilience is one of the most important skills to have on a modern family farm.

“Every day is a roller-coaster, there are highs and lows and it’s important to celebrate the wins and enjoy the ride."

Fellow speaker John Pawsey is a fourth-generation farmer from Suffolk and is an advocate for diversification to utilise the skills of all family members and staff.

“To understand how we want our family farms to look in the future, we have to ask ourselves some difficult questions. Such as: who are the best people to run our existing enterprises? What are the aspirations of our family and what are their skills? And are we actually capable of being in business together?

“If we look at the opportunities within our business - and this includes all the stuff that doesn’t involve sitting on a tractor - we have so many amazing opportunities that are not necessarily all about farming. Marketing, websites, social media and brand management are all aspects that put together could give someone a full-time role.”

The next Bitesize webinar will be hosted on Thursday 2 September at 12noon in partnership with the Nature Friendly Farming Network. The session will focus on Farming on the Frontline of Climate Change and will involve three international farmers who will share the challenges they’re facing surrounding climate change, how they are coping and adapting, as well as what future support they need.

The 2022 Oxford Farming Conference, Routes to Resilience, will be co-chaired by Barbara Bray MBE and Sarah Mukherjee MBE and will be held from Thursday 5 to Saturday 7 January 2022.

For more information on both events, please head to www.ofc.org.uk

**-Ends-**

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**Notes to Editors:**

For more information on the Oxford Farming Conference (OFC):

**Website:** [www.ofc.org.uk](http://www.ofc.org.uk)

**Twitter:** [@oxfordfarming](http://www.twitter.com/oxfordfarming)

**YouTube:** [OxfordFarmingConference](https://www.youtube.com/oxfordfarmingconference)

* The [Council](https://www.ofc.org.uk/council) is made up of 10 voluntary directors.
* OFC is held annually in January and includes a vibrant programme of speakers, panel sessions and politics sessions.  Following the circumstance of Covid-19, the conference will take virtually for one-day on Thursday 7th January 2021, returning to its traditional three-day programme in 2022
* 2021 will be the 75th conference.
* OFC has established a reputation for strong debate and exceptional speakers.
* OFC is a charity that invests in the agricultural education and knowledge-sharing. It attracts over 600 delegates every year, including many people from the wider food chain, retail, NGOs, scientific organisations, media, policy-making bodies and governments from around the world.
* With HRH Princess Royal as its patron, OFC is a charity with a remit to educate and transfer knowledge in the agricultural sector. As part of its charitable undertakings, the OFC sponsors young people to attend the conference, to travel overseas and it seeks to develop emerging leaders.