

The Land that Made Us is the story of eighty years of farming in the South West Peak. Christine Gregory and Sheila Hine have collated the personal accounts of local farmers and land managers, many of whom have lived and worked in this often challenging landscape for generations. In their own words, the farmers recall the changes to traditional farming in this remote and rugged landscape in the decades since the Second World War. The interviews also reflect the much bigger national story about the changing priorities in land use and food production.

The book and associated oral history archive created from these interviews were undertaken in partnership with the Farming Life Centre and the Peak District National Park, supported by the National Lottery Heritage Fund.

Andrew Stone

Andrew Stone grew up on Onecote Grange Farm, the dairy farm run by his parents, John and Janet Stone, who also contributed to this oral history of farming in the South West Peak. Sheila Hine talked to Andrew in 2017 about the issues affecting farming in the South West Peak.

Andrew: I work as a nutritionist for HJ Lea Oakes so I go round and see a lot of farms in the area. I work over into Cheshire, the Staffordshire Moorlands and into Derbyshire, so I probably see a more diverse range of farms than most people do. I do a lot on the organic side of things; that sends me further down country to Chepstow and into the Cotswolds. I see a diverse range of farms and a diverse range of systems, both conventional and organic. I see things that could help us here and other ideas, but every farm is different so you can't always take the ideas to another farm.

Sheila: With an oversight, how do you see things in the SWP

Andrew: It's probably a hard thing to say but the smaller traditional farms will end up dying out and the larger, specialised farms get bigger, that's what's in danger of happening because we're competing in a world market with world market prices, which smaller farms can't manage as easily.

Sheila:.. But don't you think what we've got in the SWP is so special, there should be a way of keeping it.

Andrew: There should be a way of keeping it and more agri-environment schemes would probably help but they don't really fulfil what you lose in productivity of the land. I've got a scheme on my little bit of land that I bought when I was 28 and I probably wouldn't have had it if it wasn't for the incentive of the money because I needed it to help pay my farm off. It's given it some kind of income while I was getting the sheds built and concreting the yards and things and getting it set up for having some cattle across there. Since I've been doing it, I do see the benefits of it and do like seeing the diversity of the flowers in the meadows and it does give me more of an interest in what's around me in terms of natural environment. It's not all about intensive farming systems; it is also about the landscape and the wildlife that lives within it and being part of that balance. So why I say it's a shame the way things are going is that these things are going to be lost and you can't expect the people who look after the

countryside to not move with the times because they've got a business to run. Without farming the countryside wouldn't look like it does anyway.

Sheila: So there has to be a financial incentive to be able keep it going?

Andrew: Definitely, there needs to be a financial incentive; you need to make a living to be able to stay on the land and keep the skills. It isn't attractive when you see your parents struggle for 40 years trying to make ends meet, trying to do the right thing and actually not get that well rewarded for it. It does put people off.

Sheila: So, are you confident of your future in farming?

Andrew: I am, but if we were a smaller farm I probably wouldn't be and would look further afield or try and buy somewhere bigger myself but the price of land, if you look at it from a business point of view is way out of kilter to make a living out of farming, so that's got to correct somewhere but I don't know how it will do so; it doesn't seem to go anywhere but up. They've stopped making land, it's a finite resource.