

Poultry farmer who swapped chickens for storage containers warns over UK's food security

A Somerset poultry farmer who swapped his 60,000 chickens for storage containers has warned over Britain's food security. Adam Stratton, who owns an 800-acre farm in Keynsham near Bristol, was forced to sell his hens because egg production was no longer proving profitable – despite them laying 80,000 a day.

The third-generation farmer decided to turn three barns previously used to house the chickens into storage facilities for people's belongings and vehicles instead. The business – named *Yolk Storage* in a nod to his now-departed poultry – is proving successful.

“We didn't have a competitive advantage in food production,” he told *Business Live*. “[Our farm] is a difficult site in terms of growing and we weren't big enough.”

Mr Stratton, like many British farmers, has seen margins squeezed over recent years and with many subsidies cut post-Brexit, needed to think of ways to diversify.

Around 600 acres of the farm is arable land – half is used to grow cereals and half maize – which was previously milled on site and used to feed the hens. Now, the grain is sold elsewhere. The last of the hens left the farm in 2022 and Mr Stratton set about transforming the huge sheds for his new business venture.

“The self-store containers are the best financial model,” he said. “Cars are good but caravans aren't really as they take

up quite a bit of space and you have to charge quite a lot.
“It’s steady at the moment and we have had quite a lot of
people interested. It’s certainly a growing business.”



Adam Stratton owns Manor Farm, in Keynsham, near Bristol
(Image: Hannah Baker)

Mr Stratton says with supermarkets squeezing prices, food production in the UK has become increasingly difficult.

“Caged egg units are now on farms with up to one million birds, with maybe two people looking after them. It’s pretty automated – the feeding, climate, and ventilation. Even if I had wanted to get bigger I would have struggled.

“I am concerned. We could easily have a situation where there isn’t enough domestic production. If we have an event which prevents us from importing food, if we are too reliant on other people, it could be quite difficult.

“Importing cheaper food is fine if it’s available but it is quite a big gamble to take. There is a good case for putting public money into food security, but it is a tough one as we are competing with health, education and everything else.”

Alongside his self-storage business, Mr Stratton has opened a shop and café – called Flourish – on the site of the farm’s former dairy. Until 2002, Manor Farm had 240 cows and was a 95% farming business. But growing pressures have meant diversification has been necessary in order to thrive.

Diminished subsidies, particularly since the UK left the European Union, is also an issue. The government’s Sustainable Farming Incentive (SFI), which rewards farmers for producing food sustainably and protecting the environment, has now replaced the basic payment scheme – a move Mr Stratton admits has been tough.

‘Farmers need to be allowed to be entrepreneurial’

“The basic payment scheme was worth about £70,000 a year and the SFI won’t be more than £20,000 – even if I apply for everything – so we have to make up that shortfall,” he said.

Other income streams at the farm include Woof Park, a field

which can be rented out to dog walkers, and seasonal events such as pumpkin picking. Manor Farm has also put in a planning application for a solar park.

“It is about making the most out of your assets, whatever you have got. People complain about solar parks on agricultural land, but there is plenty [of land] and a lot of it is being rewilded. The reason it’s being rewilded is because you can’t make any money out of food. It is risky planting crops, hence why we need to diversify and have a broad lot of income streams so we can mitigate against that risk.

“Farmers need to be allowed to be entrepreneurial and do other things. I hope this government will be supportive – they are making the right noises in terms of using land for other things.”

Mr Stratton says TV star Jeremy Clarkson, who highlighted issues with UK farming in his Amazon Prime show *Clarksons Farm*, has “been brilliant” for the industry.

‘Jeremy Clarkson has absolutely done something for farming’

“I think Jeremy Clarkson has absolutely done something for farming. He tells it like it is. He can afford to do stuff though as he has a significant alternative income, but he has done the figures and they cost it all – and I think on the first series they made about £75.”

When asked about the future of farming, Mr Stratton admits it will not be easy for the next generation, especially as the cost of buying a farm is so high. Most cash-poor councils, which used to have tenant-run farms, have sold those off to fill budget holes.

“The asset value of a farm and the land is so huge compared to the income it generates that you can’t really afford to buy a

farm to run it unless you're very rich already.

"The answer is it is not very easy. You go to an agricultural college and maybe work in a bigger farming business. You could end up managing a big poultry unit. It is much more industrial now but that is the way the world is going.

"For those of us lucky enough, we have the opportunity to run a family farm. I have four kids and there won't be enough in our farm to keep all of them employed so I will have to see who is really interested. My goal is to leave a viable business whatever form that takes."

Want to keep up to date with the latest business news? Why not [sign up](#) to get stories like this straight to your inbox