

# **Farmstock Futures Research**

**Helping to Shape the Future for Farmers and Agri Business.**

Commissioned researched by H&H Auction Marts during March and April 2020

The H&H team selected individuals from across the UK involved in farming and agricultural based businesses

The interviewees were all aged between 21 - 40

Independent qualitative research was undertaken by the Family Business Network

The method chosen was booked telephone interviews due to the COVID-19 Lockdown

## **The 6 Key Questions used...**

- What is your present role within Agri business?
- What do you think the future holds for Agri business?
- What do you think the challenges are for you and your Agri business?
- What would you have told yourself five years ago?
- How do you presently interact with your Mart?
- Given the choice, how would you like to interact with your Mart?

**Insight from 23 interviews**

**What is your present role  
within the Agri business?**



A broad mix of roles took part in the feedback sessions:

- 2<sup>nd</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup> & 4<sup>th</sup> Generation Farmers from both, dairy and mixed farms
- Individuals from Agricultural teams within Supermarket chains
- Farm Managers from mixed enterprises
- Specialists in Tech, Embryonic transfer and Genomics
- And further descriptors given from Area Managers to Sales Consultants, Partners and Managing Partners

**What do you think the future holds  
for Agri business?**



Looking at a positive future...

- Tech in this industry is ahead of its time and the transition of more tech-controlled farming will be the future
- We have realised less is more and we should factor more on quality rather than quantity
- The quality of our sheep gives a much better price
- Connection with the general public is key for farming in particular for educating people of all ages about the food supply
- Right now social media is a positive and user engagement needs to be captured
- I think the future is gearing up towards natural enhancements, caring for the environment and producing what the customers wants. Not just doing what farmers have always done



## Looking at a positive future...

- The food chain is going to become more prevalent as the end user is wanting more information on field to fork and every stage of this
- The key for the future is working to change consumer perception regarding agriculture and more education through organisations
- There will be a greater focus on locally sourced food and people will start to appreciate which has not travelled far
- There will be greater emphasis on emissions and the need for renewable energy
- Food is always going to be high on the agenda and its providence

## Looking at a positive future...

- We need to run the farm as a business, not just a lifestyle
- We need a focus on how the majority of farmers are friendly and efficient with the environment
- Tech will have a big part to play and it's the norm for the next generation
- We can only get better and more efficient as new discoveries are being made
- Shopping habits are changing and I think people will start to shop more locally and use traditional methods to shop
- There will be a new distribution network for meat products

Looking at a positive future...

- There will always be a place for farmers in farming
- Everyone within Agri should come together
- More collaboration and the forming of boards of control would help
- There will always be a need for farms, and I think the Vegan craze does help us
- We have a good climate for livestock which means beef and Lamb will always be good quality
- The younger generation has more opportunity to get out of farming and likewise I believe this gives opportunity for others to get in to farming
- The Farmers Network helps, and both promotes and encourages people into the industry

Looking at a challenging future...

- Pricing is being controlled too much
- Lack of support from the NFU and British Farmers Association
- We get more support from friends and own peer groups on Facebook which helps my decision making
- Dairy isn't the best way forward to make money
- If people are not willing to adapt to change then there is a major challenge for issues around succession and education
- I don't think there is a future for smaller dairy farms

Looking at a challenging future...

- Feed and diesel costs keep going up and look to me like smaller farmers are being bullied out
- With milk prices so poor I can only see the larger farms continuing in business
- I don't think the future looks bright
- Lamb and sheep prices aren't looking good and profit for the farm isn't a given
- We rely too much on subsidy

Looking at a challenging future...

- Concerned about the longevity of hill farming
- People are spending on a broader lifestyle and have too much choice – 50 years ago it was much different
- Many take farmers for granted and people assume the food is just on the supermarket shelves
- The previous generation spent 40/50% on food, now people have more income they spend it on luxuries and lifestyle and not quality food
- The romance of farming will be lost, and it will become business led
- Thoughts of working on the land will become a thing of the past

Looking at a challenging future...

- I can imagine just 10 of the biggest dairy farmers across Dumfries and Galloway running everything
- The farming supplements will be phased out (2025) and farmers will have to be more self-reliant and look for alternative ways to develop their income
- Everything is uncertain because of Brexit and whether subsidies are going to be taken away
- Smaller farms will go and the larger farms will take over
- Veganism is a threat and kids are not educated about what farmers do

Looking at a challenging future...

- The future is looking bleak if we carry on as we are
- The price of milk, meat and wheat isn't really changing, yet all others prices for production and delivery have
- Farmers need to get real and pay more than 25K for 70 hours per week



**What do you think the challenges are  
for you and your Agri business?**



## What are the challenges...

- The Greta movement and vegans are the biggest challenges to the family farms and to the Supermarkets
- Co2 emissions are a challenge especially if we continue to import so much
- They are phasing out the subsidies and that will affect a lot of farmers
- Contract farmers will be under pressure
- For me, the challenge is I don't know where our farm business will be in the future
- I feel there is more emphasis being given to the wildlife subsidies rather than the farming side for stock
- Lack of education in agriculture to end user

## What are the challenges...

- We just need to keep going and look at diversification
- I should have broadened my knowledge
- The next challenge will be to get through the current economic effects unfolding
- Last years it was all about plastic and food waste and in more recent times its about supply chain from field to fork and how the food gets to the Supermarket shelves
- The challenge is the anti-hate campaigns from the vegan community
- Having to work full time and also supporting the family farm and making it work financially
- Our challenge is to make sure we are producing what our customers want

## What are the challenges...

- We must understand how to engage with our customers and capture the feedback
- The challenge will be not to rely on the farm subsidies
- Supermarket pricing continues to be a challenge and it seems farmers don't have a choice
- I believe mental health will also be a real challenge for farmers. I convinced more training in this area will save more lives than first aid training
- The media paint a very negative picture of the farming industry
- There is a lack of leadership, voice and support to represent the farming sector against topics such as the Vegan and Greta movement
- Sheep prices will not increase so is science the answer and overhaul the sheep farming systems

## What are the challenges...

- The challenge to me is the animal food diets to ensure they are able to work within guidelines of the Government restrictions to ensure zero soya-based feed
- Red tape will get in the way of family farms and will drive future generations to change what their ancestors started
- Feel the industry as a whole has a blame culture with the middlemen in the food supply chain, meaning the supermarkets
- I would like to see organisations like the NFU/H&H Group/British Farming Association and others working together more collaboratively
- Work with industry experts to help overcome the nutritional challenges to ensure better forage nutrients freely available to the agricultural industry

## What are the challenges...

- If we improve the quality of breeding and our prices we can then compete with the rest of the world as we are behind places such as New Zealand, Australia and Ireland
- We have big problems with activists – people don't get the full picture and public perception is driven by many without all the facts
- It very difficult for me to continue developing a farm on my own and feel limited to opportunities compared to big companies who are snapping up all the land
- There are fewer Council owned farms now as many have been sold off and this gives less opportunity for others to get started in farming
- We need to influence the next generation and educate on the positive side of farming
- We need a Farmer's Union to create a system that stabilises prices, there is too much fluctuation

## What are the challenges...

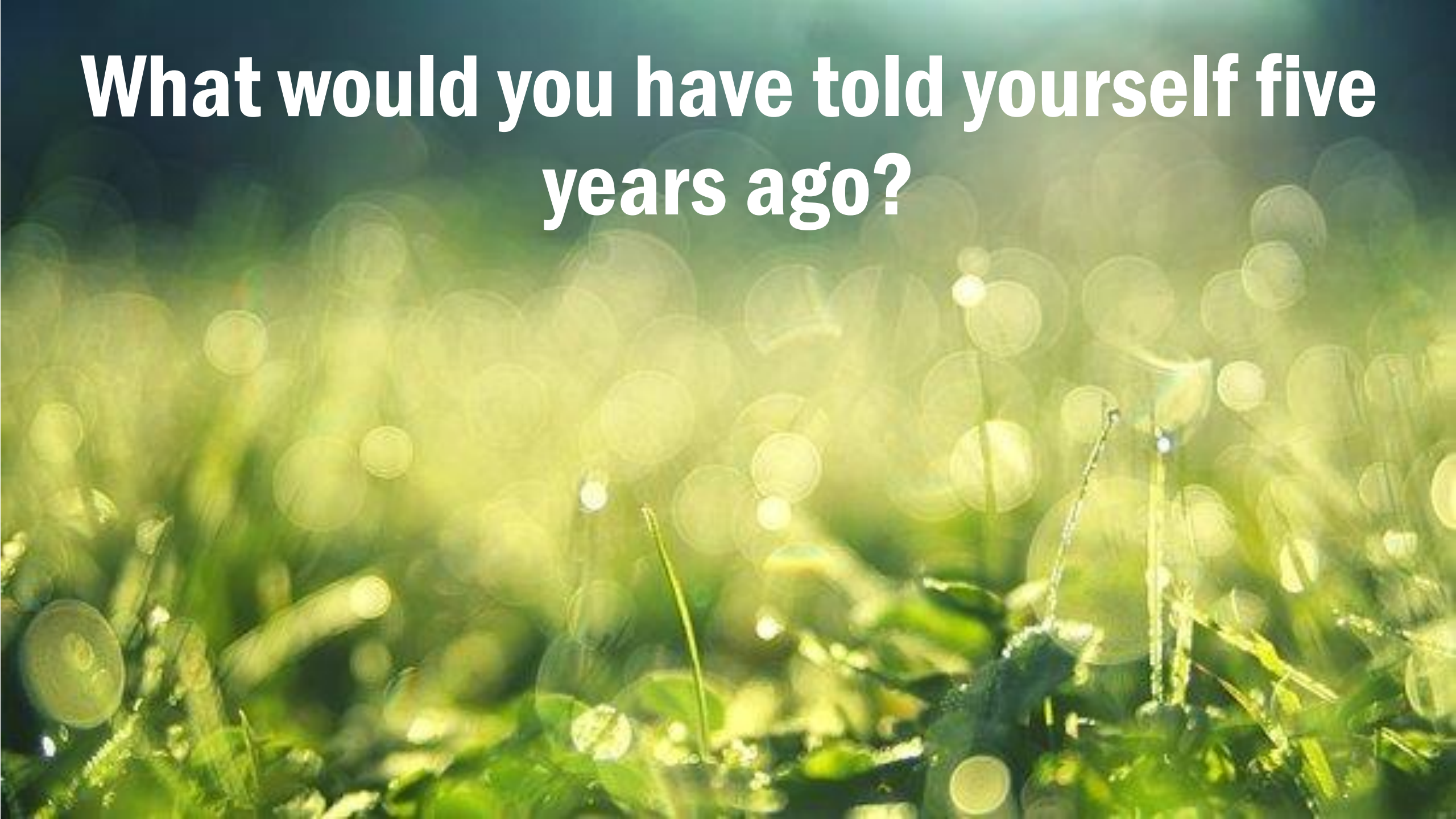
- We are victimised because of Vegans and Co2 emissions – we are an easy target
- Agri marketing is really poor in general and in particular the online presence
- We need the opportunity to get more young knowledgeable people forward and be listened to
- I believe there will only be the top 5% of farms still in business. The key is to be at the top of your game with what you are doing
- We will have to adapt to survive
- The media is the biggest challenge, they communicate the wrong message and are a catalyst for the anti-farming activists
- The biggest challenge is finding a place to manage or even just starting a small holding and growing from there

## What are the challenges...

- There does not seem to be any opportunities to get myself back in to farming at present
- The challenge to us is getting the rare breeds, we have the Limousin bulls, but non-farmers are putting money in to buy up this stock and just using as a tax dodge
- Real farmers don't have the money to invest
- We are short on workforce – people don't have the same work ethic as farmers, they try it and don't like the hours
- The sheep trade pricing keeps going up and down and you cannot forecast the prices
- There is a question about the food miles and hopefully what will come out of the current pandemic will return all to buying locally
- If we can make the ideal cow for the farmers, then there will be a future for farming



**What would you have told yourself five years ago?**



## Five years ago...

- Be more open to learning so I could improve my skillset
- I would have looked at more efficiency savings
- Probably not invested as much in cattle and bought less
- Learn more about the industry, finance and data is key for driving decisions and the future
- Do not underestimate how quickly things change so learn as much as you can to help be one step ahead
- Have more belief in myself and be bolder in learning new ways, don't just stick with what you know
- I really didn't think we would have gone in to diversification

## Five years ago...

- The Prince's Trust helped me and opened my eyes to what is possible
- In hindsight I should have done an agri course
- I would have pushed harder with my father as Goat farming is becoming huge and shows signs of being able to be more financially sustainable
- Advice to myself would have been to listen more – I was just out of Newcastle University studying Agriculture and I thought I knew everything
- What people look for is the fact you can work hard and apply yourself – I would have put character first above qualifications
- I have learnt you don't have to do everything yourself and delegation works
- You cannot change everything and don't try to

## Five years ago...

- Learn to work with what you have but seek new efficient ways to work smarter not harder
- Run the farm as a business rather than a lifestyle
- After 6<sup>th</sup> Form, I went to college to study for a degree – I would have been better just building connections across the UK and having a stronger network to call on
- I wish when I was in New Zealand I had taken more notice of what they were doing, we would be much further ahead by now in our thinking
- We would have a 2 strike rule with problem animals
- We should have more data and analysis to run the farm as a business
- As farmers we should get together more often, we are very isolated

## Five years ago...

- There is a problem with jealousy between farmers and very few share and talk to each other and you feel on your own
- Would choose not to gamble our money and manage finances much better than previous generation
- Be more open to learning and don't think that traditional ways are the best way forward
- Learn from others and be open to new and innovative ideas
- I grew too big too quickly and paid everyone else before myself and family
- I went to Agri College in Edinburgh however I learnt more on the farm and just valued the social aspect of the College
- Once you come back to the farm you never leave, and I continue to learn from my dad

## Five years ago...

- Between the ages of 18-24 we seem to know it all – as I have grown older, I can see the world is much bigger and I have learnt to take onboard other peoples views
- I should have gone to Agri College, more for the social scene and connecting with more people
- I regret not going to Harper Adams, I believe it would have broadened my horizons, and given me better social circles

**How do you presently interact  
with your Mart?**

A close-up photograph of a green plant, possibly a succulent or a similar leafy plant, with several water droplets on its leaves. The background is a soft, out-of-focus green, creating a bokeh effect. The text is overlaid on the top half of the image.

## Interaction with the Mart...

- I feel its important to attend the Marts as they help with social engagement amongs the industry and we watch the online sales for personal information
- We put 60% of our cattle through the Mart and would say we are very active with a number of Marts
- I interact with the Marts on a daily basis through my professional role – personally I attend when the specialist beef cattle sales are on
- We just use the Carlisle Mart and they support us with the pedigree sales
- When its open we are down there on a regular basis and use Facebook to see what's happening
- Tend to go to Hexham for sheep and cattle sales, love the experience and the social contact
- Find the learning each time is invaluable from others just by having a conversation



## Interaction with the Mart...

- We do buy lambs through the Mart and value the pedigree sales
- Due to work commitments its difficult to get to the Marts however we do watch the cattle sales online and that keeps us up to speed personally on prices
- Within my professional role at a Supermarket I keep in touch regularly due to pricing and policy tracking movement of cattle
- Probably put 98% of overall stock through the Mart however we do buy cattle direct from other farmers
- I have attended educational talks and visits which they arrange and get lots of benefit from these
- Only interact at this stage with cattle sales, as we sell the sheep direct to abattoirs due to close link with Supermarket – however very unhappy on an ethical basis with how the Supermarket have treated the farming industry through COVID-19 and looking to change and maybe return to the Marts
- We go weekly and love the social interaction and feel H&H need to keep this aspect of the Marts to help engage the industry

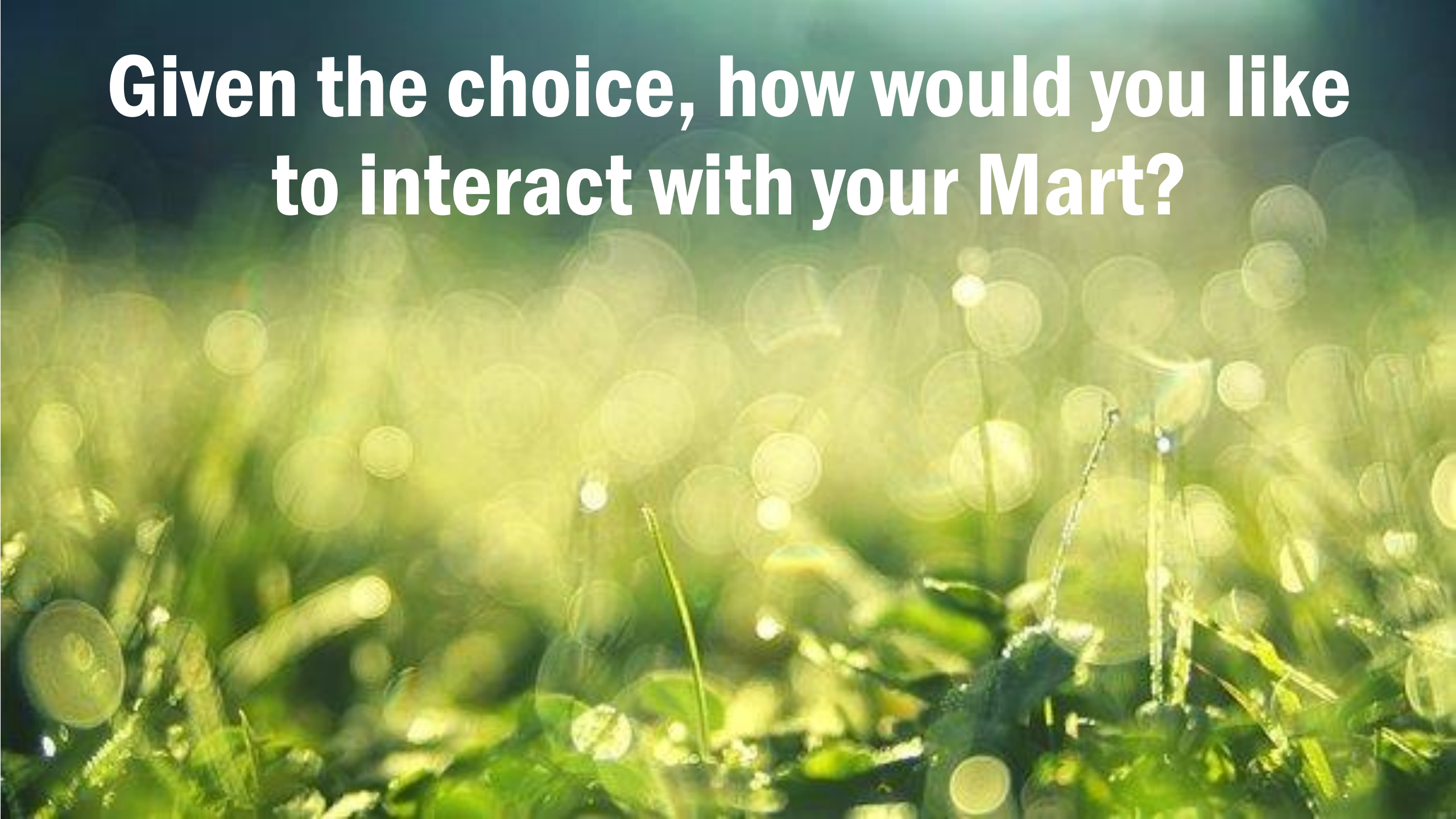
## Interaction with the Mart...

- The Marts provide huge help with aspects of mental health with face to face engagement for everyone
- Marts help with bringing us together and we receive texts and calls and I use the Facebook and follow what's happening
- We can spend too much time at the Mart and the time factor is a problem to look at
- They serve their purpose and we should use them more
- I work with H&H and another Mart to help me sell my pedigree Heifers and find the Mart in Carlisle is a really good place to sell my elite cows
- There is plenty of activity on Facebook if you keep looking and we also receive texts and emails
- The Marts are very good for the farmers to go each week and helps with their mental wellbeing and its one place they share their stress and their ideas

## Interaction with the Mart...

- I believe H&H have a very good and positive attitude towards adding value to animals
- The Mart is part of the community and its like a community hub for us
- I find it's a good learning environment
- I like to interact with others when at the Marts for social and educational reasons
- The Mart is a positive hub and its going to cause a lot of depression with folk not being able to meet up currently
- Its good for the social aspect and we do get regular calls keeping us up to date
- We get involved with the Dairy Expo Show and have in the past helped with the preparation of sales
- In peek times its probably 5 auctions a week buying and selling our cattle and sheep

**Given the choice, how would you like  
to interact with your Mart?**

A close-up photograph of a green plant with water droplets on its leaves, serving as a background for the text. The image is slightly out of focus, with the text in the foreground being sharp. The background shows various shades of green and the glistening surfaces of water droplets.

## How would we like to interact with the Mart...

- Keep doing what they are doing but ensure a good balance of both technology and face to face for the future
- The social engagement is key for many farmers
- British Agriculture needs all the help and support and feel that H&H are a key player in driving this for the future
- You have to be at the Mart to buy, you cannot just look at images, you need to be there and buy on your gut feel
- H&H need to build the relationship with the next generation
- I think the Mart could help us share more about what we are doing and when there is a problem, we could help each other
- I have a WhatsApp group for sharing and some sort of group sharing would be good where we can talk to each other

## How would we like to interact with the Mart...

- We would like more help to develop Goat sales
- Would like more Mart support for smaller farmers and not sure what help is given to the hill farmers
- Its ideal at present for me, I like the live streaming and the online content
- Would like to see more progressive educational events for the next generation both face to face and online
- Facebook is a huge platform for farmers and feel they would get more engagement if there were more specific topics for next gens to improve their professional development
- Feel pressure with activists will become a bigger challenge so would like to see H&H take steps now to work with relevant organisations to show that they are doing something
- The Mart is a social network and farmers need to help each other, share and communicate more

## How would we like to interact with the Mart...

- The Marts would be good to run training courses with the space that they have, especially health and safety on farms – this would get more farmers and their workers engaging with the Marts and coming through the door
- More educational events and opportunity to meet new peers of similar age and in similar situations
- Would like to see how more tech could help across the board
- Disease in sheep can be a problem at Marts which is why we switch in going direct to abattoirs, so would be good to see how this could be managed in the future at Marts
- Would be interested to see more Tech and Facebook integration as a whole with H&H and this is the biggest form of communication for me and my brother
- The speed of sales reports online is quick, but could it be quicker?

## How would we like to interact with the Mart...

- Video interface would be good for ongoing queries and asking questions
- Some of the Marts seem stuck in their ways and should broaden out more with what they do – some of the Marts are good but important for me to have the right generation running the Mart
- Its good to share images and helps sell to a wider audience rather than those who just attend on the day
- With our local Mart the guy is old and I think we should bring some youth in to the auction Mart
- I would like to see more online sales and maybe one big sale each year
- There is a credibility in using a Mart and so more people should be engaging online
- Not all Marts are the same, some can be complacent and idle
- I value a Mart that is being proactive



## How would we like to interact with the Mart...

- Webcams at the sales would be good so then when you leave stock you can track them online and see who they have been sold to
- Educational resources online in particular around the topics which are crucial to help farming become more efficient
- Farmers are very proud and keep themselves to themselves and should talk to each other more at the Mart
- Older farmers like to use the phone and I think the Marts should show more interest in the individuals and build bridges with the actual farmers, not just their farm businesses
- It would be good to just go up to someone and ask – how are you? It's a basic human quality
- Some of the Auctioneers can be quite distant and appreciate they can be very busy on sales days, but still they could interact a little more with people

## How would we like to interact with the Mart...

- I like the Marts to make an effort, calling us and visiting and value those that show an interest in us, not just the farm stock
- The auctions give value to an animal and they should shout about that more and do more promotions on exactly what the Marts do
- I like the breeding sales and it would help to have more photos and video
- I would like more online information ahead of arriving at the auction