**Court-Garden**

<https://www.dropbox.com/s/hztp73oj76ggag8/Court%20Garden%20-%204th%20cut.mp3?dl=0>

Will Evans: Hi, I'm Will Evans, and welcome to another episode of Ahead of the Field from NFU Mutual. Today we're in East Sussex in southeast England, an area that produces over three quarters of the wine produced in Great Britain.

We’ll be hearing about a 10-year journey from farming sheep to creating award winning wines…

…we’ve seen both the quality of wine and the commercial sustainability of wine increase…

…the challenges along the way…

…we can see the struggles of sheep farming and I thought I could come and help run the wine making here…

and the positives of inviting the public onto the farm…

…it is actually a growing income stream which of course every farm is looking for…

And to find out more about NFU Mutual's tailored insurance for grape growers and wine makers, and their partnership with Wine GB, search for NFU Mutual Wine.

So welcome to Court Garden, a vineyard in the shadow of the South Downs. It's a family run, single estate, vineyard and winery run by Howard Corney. Hi Howard.

Howard Corney: Morning Will, very pleased to see you here.

Will Evans: You too. So, not so long ago you were farming sheep here, tell us how you went from that to what we see here today?

Howard Corney: Well it's all down to Foot and Mouth.As everyone in the farming world will remember too well, probably, 2001, the Foot and Mouth hit the country, although, we ourselves, didn't experience Foot and Mouth, but the big thing about Foot and Mouth was the close down of all the markets, close down of all movements. Effectively it put the question of rearing sheep in doubt.

And we were then open for a diversification. Our first exploration of diversification was forced upon us, because we couldn't sell the lamb directly, well we could sell it in the market, but you got so little money for it.

But we did notice that the price in the high street didn't seem to have changed. And so, we set it up as a farm shop initially, just to sell our own lamb.

And then by 2004 we were approached by a neighbour who had become quite successful at producing sparkling wine, Ridge View up the road.

And they had established about eight years ago, eight years before that actually, and they were needing more grapes, and they approached us would we be interested in growing them some grapes.

And we said well, matter of fact, we are interested in doing something different, and we agreed to plant a five-acre field with grapes, with the initial intention of treating the grapes like an agricultural product, and selling them to them, and they would take it further.

But we got rather too interested in the project, and in fact, entered into a champagne style agreement with them actually. Where they made, we supplied the grapes to them, and they paid for those grapes by making a proportion of it into wine back for us.

So, and this, as it, make it sound sexy, give it a French name, a Metayage, it's known as.

But we were, we soon realised, we wanted actually to do the whole operation. We gradually, over a period, took over all the, all the wine manufacture, wine production processes.

Will Evans: Had you always had an interest in wine yourself?

Howard Corney: I think we were interested in wine; I think probably more than most, but I think most folks are interested in wine. We'd enjoyed vineyards in France.

It came about as a result of, we need a diversification for the farm. Of course, the interest grew from there, and now the vineyard has pretty well taken over, the vineyard and wine production, and everything involved in that has pretty well taken over our life, and in fact, son Hugo's life as well.

Will Evans: How long had you been here on the farm, what's the history of the place?

Howard Corney: Ah yes, well we came here in, we came here in 96 with a lot of sheep. There was some arable growing here then, and we continued that for two years with a farming friend of ours.

Will Evans: And going back to the wine, you timed it perfectly, do you think it's a boom time for English and Welsh wine now?

Howard Corney: Yes, I think it is, I think you are right, that we were, we were lucky in the interest accelerating in English wine, and it was rather nice to be involved in something where there was a feeling of success.

Will Evans: And it must be a very complex operation, do you have a big team here?

Howard Corney: We should have. We have a small team doing lots of different jobs. We've got a vineyard manager, Dave, who you, we will meet in a moment out in the vineyard.

He now has, this is quite new, he now has an assistant to help him with vineyard operations. My son, Hugo, joined us a few years back, with a background in accountancy, which was fantastically valuable for any business, to have an accountant onboard.

But he came with the intention of producing the wine, having taken on a full-time wine making course at Plumpton College. We have some part timers who help us out with jobs like labelling, vineyard tours, vineyard tourism has suddenly become, is an important part of our business. Meeting the public, etc.

Will Evans: We've also now been joined by Howard's son, Hugo. Hugo, what made you decide to give up your initial career and get involved?

Hugo: I wanted to help the farm become more sustainable. As children, we could see the struggles with sheep farming. So that was in the background, you think, well it's always quite hard work, what's going on.

I was currently working for a large brewing organisation in their finance department, and I thought well I could go and do a degree in wine making, which sounded quite good. And then, I would come and help run the wine making here.

Because a vineyard takes about 10 years to produce profitable grapes. And so, you can't just do it as a whim.

Will Evans: So, your previous skills from accountancy will have come in very useful?

Hugo: Yes I think turning from a bean counter into a grape counter has been a nice transition. And it is important, when running a small family business, to be aware of the cash flow, the importance of cash flow.

Will Evans: Yeah, so it's a little bit breezy outside, it's not a typical sunny day for walking around a vineyard, but let's go and have a look around then, shall we?

Hugo: Brilliant, let's go and have a look around.

Will Evans: So we've walked around the corner into the field where the vineyards are, it's not quite what I expected, I was expecting wide open rolling hills, and it's quite a lot of trees, high hedges, and it's quite enclosed really.

Did you choose this site specifically, does it have to be a south facing slope, for instance?

Howard Corney: If you had an open canvass of where to choose, you would choose a south facing slope, because it's giving you all the advantages. But for anyone who's travelled in France, and had a look around, they will notice that actually, vines are growing in all directions.

Will Evans: OK. So which varieties do you grow and produce here?

Howard Corney: Well we set out to produce sparkling wine, champagne by another name, you might say. We certainly wouldn't, but some folks might.

So we are producing the champagne varieties, which is Chardonnay, Pinot Noir and Pinot Meunier, those three varieties are grown in champagne.

Will Evans: So Hugo, which are the most successful?

Hugo: Pinot Gris has been very successful, but the variety's success vary each year. So last year was a fantastic Chardonnay year.

But the year before was a fantastic Pinot Noir year, and it really depends each year. But one of the varieties I'm most proud of is our Pinot Gris, and it makes the most wonderful still white wine. And we were very lucky to have a good crop of it last year.

Will Evans: And when you get a summer like last year, 2018, I presume that makes the job much easier than a summer like this year, for instance?

Hugo: Absolutely, so we measure, we have a weather station in our vineyard, and we can measure what's called the growing degree days, which are days when the average temperature is above 10 degrees.

And last year was, we had over 1000 growing degree days within the ripening period between April and October. And this year, at the moment, we are at about 700.

Will Evans: And is it very vulnerable to bad weather, for instance?

Hugo: Yes, we're a maritime climate, being an island, and so if we have wet warm weather, that is a great environment for mould, so our mitigating actions for that is, we strip the leaves off the fruiting zone.

And then the mould finds it much harder to establish itself. And we also spray on things on the vineyard to protect against mould. And one example of that, which I think is quite amusing, is garlic essence. And so we spray, so garlic has a very high sulphur content, and we spray this compound on.

And it does smell a bit like an Italian restaurant for a short while, but I'm pleased to say, it doesn't express itself in the wine, otherwise we'd have quite a niche market.

Will Evans: You've won lots of awards for your wine, are you always developing and improving them?

Hugo: Yes, we take a great deal and pride in our wine, and we're presenting our wines to wholesalers, and trade customers on a regular basis. And we get quite accurate feedback from them, they'll tell you something is good aromas, good flavours, good levels of acidity.

And we do use the awards, and we have 96 awards now, including several international awards.

Will Evans: So let's go down to the vines and have a closer look then, shall we Hugo?

Hugo: Yes, let's wander down.

Dave Perrin: My name is Dave Perrin, I'm the vineyard manager here at Court Garden.

It's coming to the time of year when the grapes are ripening, going through what we call, Veraison which is where the grapes soften and the sugars develop, which will eventually turn into alcohol, obviously.

This is Chardonnay we're looking at, at the moment, and they're probably about the latest one to mature of all the grapes we have. And if you touch them here, you can fell they're just beginning to go soft now, which means they're beginning to ripen.

Will Evans: How old would these vines be that we're looking at now?

Dave Perrin: They're 2014, they were planted, so we had about three years before we got any real crop, so this is probably their second good cropping year, I think it's our third actual crop from them, isn't it, should be the second sort of full crop, as it were, or nearly full crop.

Will Evans: And how long will they produce a crop for?

Dave Perrin: Ideally, for about 25 years, maybe 30 years, it depends, some things can get in the way, it's a bit varietal dependent. If vines in this country, well through most of Europe really, are planted on a root stock. And it's the compatibility really, of the vine and the root stock, which sort of determines how long they're going to last really.

Will Evans: OK, so perhaps you could talk us through the growing season then?

Dave Perrin: So we get a bud burst in the beginning of April, and then we get the shoots grow steadily, then until we get to sort of flowering, you can see all the little potential flowers, the inflorescences, as they're called, developing.

But we actually then get flowering up towards sort of end of June, through first half of July, something like that. And again, it's varietal dependent. And also weather dependent at the time.

But once we've had flowering then, that's a critical point for the weather really. The weather needs to be fairly warm, fairly dry. If it's cold and windy at that time of year, then that can affect flowering quite significantly.

Will Evans: And I suppose that's like any other crop, harvesting is the most labour-intensive time of year?

Dave Perrin: Pretty well, yeah, so it's certainly in the shortest period, I mean, we're very busy over winter, when it comes to sort of pruning, and getting the vines ready to go to sleep, and ready for the following year.

But basically, weather is the, dictates everything really.

Will Evans: Yes well I suppose that's the same with anything, anything you're farming in the UK, doesn't it?

Dave Perrin: Yeah any aspect of farming really, but.

Howard Corney: It's more pronounced, I think it's more pronounced in the vineyard than in other areas. I think you could, if you look at the crop variation, last year was a very good, a very good season for us, and we picked 60 tons of grapes.

But wind the clock back to 2014, we hadn't got quite as many grapes coming on then, but we had 44 tons of grapes, if we go, wind the clock back to 2012, we had two tons of grapes.

So there is a massive variation, and that variation is just the weather.

If we have a frost at bud burst, it can be devastating, so you could potentially lose your whole crop through a frost.

And you may ask what we do about the frost, well there are lots of different techniques how people deal with frost. But here, we rely on large candles that we light.

Will Evans: So you're even more of a weather obsessive than the usual farmer?

Howard Corney: Oh I think we are very, very weather obsessive, I mean Dave mentioned about with flowering and how we must have the right conditions for flowering. And it's pretty obvious, if you don't have good flowering, sorry not much of a crop, and you're a bit stuffed on that one, I think that's the technical term, isn't it?

Will Evans: But if there is a typical year, what would be the amount of tons of grapes you'd have to have per acre?

Howard Corney: For us, three and a half tons per acre is a good crop. People do have four tons and even sometimes a little more. But actually, three and a half is - that's in a good year.

Will Evans: OK. So a crop like this, where the vines last for such a long time, 25 to 30 years, do you get emotionally attached to them?

Dave Perrin: We get very emotionally attached, I think, to the whole process, I try not to get attached to individual vines, you only get hurt in the end, don’t you?

Will Evans: Even though modern technology, it will still be the same process over thousands of years of making wine.

Dave Perrin: I think modern wine making methods are very, the basic method is the same, but attention to sort of detail, and important aspects of it is very different yes.

Howard Corney: If you're talking about ancient wine making, wine making is a natural process, it's just a question of how much intervention goes into it. And with the knowledge that we have, that the ancients didn't have, we can intervene that much better and with the sort of sciences that are available now to control, you know, like the speed of a ferment by cooling it down, those were tools that weren't available to people making wine in Roman times.

Well really it was just the wine making itself then.

Will Evans: OK, so where are we now?

Howard Corney: This is a former, this is a former grain store, that's going back a bit. So, I suppose, it must have been about 2008, we started to convert this in small stages, from a grain store into a cellar, and winery.

Will Evans: So we're joined now by Alistair Nesbit from Vinescapes, who works with new and established wine producers. Hi Alistair.

Alistair: Hello there.

Will Evans: English and Welsh wine used to be the butt of jokes, how has the quality improved over the years?

Alistair: Well you're right, it was a bit of a joke, and I think over the last 15/20 years, we've seen both the quality of wine, and the commercial sustainability of wine increase. And that's tied in with a change in varieties, it's tied in with a change in wine style that's been made in England and Wales.

And that's underpinned, predominantly, by a change in our climatic conditions that enable us to grow those varieties to make really, really high-quality wines now that, I think, as Hugo and Howard have said previously, are winning awards nationally and internationally.

Will Evans: So climate and the change in nature of land has played a bit part then?

Alistair: Absolutely, undoubtedly, but by background I'm an academic, I studied viticulture and climate change. We've modelled climate change for the growing season in England and Wales, over the last 50 to 60 years.

And we've seen the average temperatures increase, to a point at which the varieties that we predominantly grow in England and Wales now, so Chardonnay, Pinot Noir, Pino Meunier, can give us high quality sustainable yields.

Will Evans: Is it something that lots of farmers are thinking about doing?

Alistair: We certainly, as a company, are getting more interest from farmers, one of the areas we focus on heavily is evaluating land to see how suitable it is, or not, to plant vines.

So we get enquiries from farmers to come out and assess their land, and they're looking to diversify, predominantly from commodity-based crops, into something that gives them a more direct route to market.

That's long term, and that has a bright future, and that is something that is of interest to them. So we, yes is the short answer, we get a lot of enquiries.

Will Evans: And what's the main business model for wine production?

Alistair: One of the things we work with at the outset with any new client, is trying to answer that question. Because there's a range of models that are now applicable in the UK wine production sector.

It could be anything from simply growing grapes under contract, to a winery, so in other words, forgetting the wine making side of things and just growing grapes.

It could be the more traditional route of having a vineyard, and a winery. Or it could be a mixture of both, or it could be just focusing on wine production end.

Will Evans: So what about here at Court Garden, what kind of an area is this for wine production?

Alistair: One of the best is the short answer, in England and Wales it's one of the best. Southeast England, Sussex, Kent, parts of Surrey, parts of Hampshire, are extremely suitable for viticulture.

But also research we've undertaken recently, has shown that parts of East Anglia, Southern East Anglia, parts of the Seven Estuary, are also just as warm, if not, a bit drier, and a bit more stable year on year.

Will Evans: OK. So Howard, we're here in the winery now, we're surrounded by large stainless steel tanks, you obviously are putting out quite a serious level now. What's your distribution model?

Howard Corney: Well locally it's very important to us, so we, I will just tell you a little story about how, when we started distributing, when we used to be from just the farm shop, and our initial model, was to approach businesses which were a bit like ourselves, which were the local independent wine merchants.

Maybe about eight of them I think. And they took everything we could produce, we thought this is absolutely fine, we've got this sorted, and as we grow we simply move our line of independent wine merchants out.

So instead of having eight, we moved to 16, and we thought that was just the way to do it. But in fact, there was a flaw in that argument, which was quite interesting, because I might approach somebody 10 miles away and they would say, that's very nice, I like your wine, it's great, I said would you like to stock it, well no I won't stock it, even though it’s very nice because I've actually got somebody else just round the corner.

And we hadn't really taken that into account, but the local [count] was very important. So for us, our next, our next bit of distribution was to look at the London market, because there's clearly not vineyards growing in London, and there's a lot of wine drunk. And so, we approached a number of independent wine merchants in London, so they're taking wine. We also take advantage of wholesalers, who have a different network of distribution, they can meet the on trade that we couldn't possibly, we do deal with one or two local restaurants, but we couldn't be dealing with a restaurant the other side of the country very easily. Because they perhaps only want three bottles.

And it's not economical to do it. So that's where the wholesaler really has the role to play.

Will Evans: And what about overseas sales?

Howard Corney: Very little of that. We did put a toe in the water with selling to America, but we found it was a little bit out of scale with us, it maybe something that we'll return to in the future.

Will Evans: So the English and Welsh wine industry has clearly grown enormously over the last decade, how does it compare to foreign wine production?

Hugo: Well in the UK, 2018 harvest was one of our biggest harvests to date, and there's been a great deal of investment across 600 vineyards that are planted. We are estimated to have made 15 million bottles of wine from that 2018 harvest.

That would compare to say, a large champagne producer like Moet & Chandan, that produces about 34 million bottles a year. So we are less than half the size of one of the large champagne houses.

Will Evans: And as you said, you were originally just a sheep farmer, can we go and have a look at the flock now please?

Howard Corney: You certainly can, let's go.

Will Evans: So we've walked down to the sheep shed now, and we're faced with a shed full of great looking north country mules, they've obviously done really well this year. Jenny Corney, you're in charge of the sheep farming side of the business, perhaps you could tell us a bit about it?

Jenny: Well we started at the farm with a large flock of breeding yews, and we have whittled that down to about 150 now, who we grow on from being lambs at six months, until they are a year older, and then they will go as breeding yews to the South Down, the big sales at the Dolphin Fayre.

I'm very fond of these types of sheep, they're very good mothers, they will feed their lambs beautifully, as this little lamb is, bring them on strong, and the mothers will lose weight, and the lambs will get fatter and fatter.

They're a good, good breeding yew, and they're very popular in the south because they come down here and they do well on our lowland grass and produce a good lamb for market.

Will Evans: And how does the sheep side of the business fit in with the rest of it?

Jenny: Well the thing is, we've got still a lot of fields, that are not put out to vineyard, and so they need to be grazed, and they need to have hay cut, and then grazed for the rest of the year. So we do need some form of sheep to graze them.

And this seems the best, the best way of doing that.

Will Evans: Do the sheep ever get overlooked with all the excitement of the wine and everything else you've got going on here?

Jenny: It fits in very well with the wine year, because the sheep are growing on through the summer, they're shorn in the summer, but the wine is busy in October, which is when we sold them as breeding yews, so there's not too much conflict, and certainly, we look after our sheep, and keep them well.

Will Evans: Annie Streeter is here too, the local NFU Mutual viticulture agent, and David Harrison from one of NFU Mutual's farm and viticulture insurance specialists.

Will Evans: Annie, what do you think of what Howard and the family have created here?

Annie: I think this is a fantastic example of true farm diversification, a family using their assets to the best of their ability, retraining themselves and becoming fantastic marketeers to make this vineyard what it is today.

Will Evans: And what help have you been able to provide along the way?

Annie: I've managed to advise the Corney's on their insurance protection, so that we have been through the hard transition massive capital investment over the past years. So that now, we're in a productive situation, we are protecting the business, we're looking at four or five years of protection going forward.

Rather than maybe just insuring 12 months cover, we're actually looking much further forward, so the investment really is protected.

Will Evans: So if a farmer came to you looking for advice, what help would you be able to give them?

Annie: I've been involved in quite a number of establishments where we're actually looking at the initial vine planting, and the trellising, and the deer fencing. And actually protecting that investment for what is actually a couple of years only.

Before we have any productive situation, so we will then look into actually when the vines are going to be productive, where they're selling that to. Are they going to have their own winery, are there contracts in force we need to know about.

Any other changes on the assets, new buildings, new wineries. And then looking forward even at things where we might have HMRC duty at risk, that we need to protect.

And new plantings, so it's a constantly evolving project where we're talking, sometimes now on a quarterly basis, to keep those stock values of that finished wine up to date.

Will Evans: David it seems that interest in English and Welsh wines are booming, how quickly is the industry growing?

David: It's growing very fast, a great success story over recent years. 2018 harvest really stood out, and the predictions for this year are also looking pretty positive. According to some stats from Wines of Great Britain, the hectarage and the vine has increased by 83 percent since 2015.

And the hectarage planted in Great Britain has quadrupled since the year 2000, and by all accounts, as we heard from Alistair earlier on, that's likely to continue.

As Hugo mentioned, the equivalent of around 15, 15 and a half million bottles were produced in Great Britain in 2018, and that's predicted to reach 40 million bottles by 2040.

And it's a mixture of farmers and landowners diversifying from traditional farming enterprises, as we've seen here today at Court Garden, and also new entrants to the sector as well. It's a really young and dynamic industry.

Will Evans: And tell us about NFU Mutual's viticulture agents?

David: Well NFU Mutual has over 300 agencies around the UK, but for our relationship with Wines of Great Britain, there are currently 12 agents who are focused on Wine GB members, as you've just heard from Annie now.

And they have specialist knowledge required to ensure that we provide the best advice to Wine GB members.

And these agents have got an interest in wine and viticulture, they've got existing vineyard, and wine producing customers, so they're familiar with what makes vineyards tick.

And some of the challenges for new entrants into the sector. We're also working with Wine GB and Plumpton College, who are acknowledged as real experts in the wine sector, to ensure that we keep abreast of developments in the industry.

Will Evans: So tell us more about your partnership with Wine GB?

David: So at the start of 2019, NFU Mutual entered into a partnership with Wines of Great Britain for a three-year term. And we feel it's a great fit for us without commitments to farming, agriculture and the horticultural heritage of NFU Mutual. So it made perfect sense to partner with them.

We've also got expertise in food and drink manufacturing, hospitality and retail and wholesale sectors as well. So it works really well for us, and we're keen to be associated with them.

Wine GB are the National Association for English and Welsh wines, and they're really aiming to advance the interests of their members through seminars, tastings, tours, marketing, legal support and advice, and a whole host of other things as well.

Will Evans: So for any people listening, who might be interested in getting into viticulture, where can they get some advice from?

David: I think the first port of call would be your NFU Mutual viticulture agent, and you can find more details on our website about that. But also consider joining Wine GB as well, who, as we've mentioned are the industry representing wine growers in this country.

Howard Corney: It's worth mentioning that Plumpton College does full time courses for students in viticulture and oenology. So first degree and they also do masters courses as well.

But for the listeners to this podcast, might be interested in the short courses of five days in viticulture, I think they're called introduction to viticulture and introduction to wine making. And, but they do those in the autumn, and that would be a very, very good source of information.

Will Evans: Right, we’ve been here long enough. Let’s go and taste some wine shall we?

So, cheers everybody.

Howard Corney: Cheers, good to see you.

Will Evans: Oh wow, that's really fresh isn't it. That's lovely.

Hugo: It's a very nice taste of baked apple as well as the citrusy flavours, and that's coming through from the Chardonnay. And this is a blend of Chardonnay, Pinot Noir, Pinot Meunier, it's our 2015 classic cuvee.

Will Evans: What is the most common reaction you get from people who haven't tried English sparkling wine before?

Hugo: It's very positive, and in fact, they're quite surprised how nice it is. Often they'll compare it to a champagne in style, or perhaps, and they'll compare it also to prosecco and sort of the key difference being this is much smaller bubbles.

But it's been quite favourable feedback, and I think by the time, typically, our visitors have been on a tour of the vineyard and winery, and by the time they come into the tasting room, not only have they been waiting quite a long time for a glass of wine. But they also are quite in awe of the amount of work that goes into a glass of wine, that can be consumed quite quickly.

Will Evans: And is it realistic to think that English and Welsh sparkling wines could eventually rival French and Italian?

Howard Corney: Oh certainly, oh certainly, not eventually, no not eventually, we're there, we are there. We are producing English and Welsh, are producing first class sparkling wine, which is absolutely the equivalent of a French champagne.

Hugo: But your point about our comparison to, in terms of awards, we entered our wine in a French competition, and our wines faired very well against champagnes, and they were tasted blind, typically by French judges.

Will Evans: So thinking about the wider business, you've got a really strong brand, how did you go about building that up, and could you call upon the history of the farm?

Howard Corney: Oh certainly, certainly, I mean we were very lucky in a way, that Court Garden, as an entity, has in fact existed for 1000 years, probably more than that actually.

And one of the bits of history we like to show on our bottle is in fact an old map. This is a 1790 map of a small section of a whole map of Sussex. Yeakell and Gardner's map of Sussex, and there is Court Garden right in the middle.

The fields are pretty well the same layout as they are now. Ditchling's changed a bit, we've got a road going through it now, we didn't then. But otherwise, you know, we're just the same, there we are, there's our drive, 1790.

We're very lucky that we haven't had to invent that, even if you think I did.

Hugo: Building the brand Court Garden, has been something we've been quite focused on, because we want all the services and output that we do at Court Garden, whether it's operas, weddings, corporate tastings, public tastings, dealing with trade customers, even the letterheads. We want it to be a consistent message.

Will Evans: And there's a big presence in the local community too, you mentioned operas there, how did that come about?

Hugo: Well we've been looking at various ways of using our beautiful Sussex barn, and one of which was to use for weddings. And the other is, because we've got this lovely space, to actually host operas, which we raise money for Alzheimer's Society. And that enables us both to have a bar with Court Garden wine.

But also to encourage people to come and visit Court Garden, have a really nice evening, they go away with a nice feeling about Court Garden and they've raised a bit of money for charity.

Will Evans: And how important has support from the local community been?

Hugo: It's very important, because those events don't work, or raise any money for charity if you don't have a full house. But actually building on the local community, we use friends of Court Garden to come and pick the grapes. And so that is all part of our community led behaviour.

Will Evans: So what made you decide to open up the vineyard to touring groups?

Howard Corney: Ah, well it's very important, it's a way of getting our message around, it is actually a growing income stream, which of course, every farm is looking for.

People pay to come, they have a very nice time, and they go away with good feelings about Court Garden, and very often, a couple of bottles as well.

Hugo: And the visitors become brand ambassadors because they come here on a Friday or Saturday for a tour, they've had a nice experience.

And they go back to work on the Monday, chat about what they did at the weekend, and rather than household chores, they're able to talk about some happy experience. And I think it just helps spread the word, and so maybe one of those colleagues will come and visit us the following weekend. And it becomes a continuous wheel of interest.

Will Evans: And does it help that it's also still a working farm, is that an attraction to visitors?

Howard Corney: I think so, but it probably, it probably isn't their major reason for coming. They come because they're interested in English sparkling, or wine, and it's a nice thing to do. People come for different reasons, quite often they're celebrating something, and they think, what shall we do. And for a two-hour period, it's not such an expensive thing to do, to come and have a nice walk round a vineyard.

Hugo: Keeping the farm as a working farm, it enabled the landscapes to look fantastic. The fields won't maintain a look as well as they do if you don't have livestock grazing them.

It's very different mowing with a tractor, to make it cut the grass, but actually you've got livestock on the land, it's a much healthier environment. And that encompasses, including the vineyard makes it a very nice setting for people to come and visit. So I think it's very important, the combination of the two.

Will: So what are your plans for the future?

Hugo: I'd like a day off.

Howard Corney: I thought you had yesterday off.

Hugo: No, our plans for the future, well we are planting a little bit more vineyard, but not a great deal more. We've got to a stage now where we've got, I think, the right volume of wine coming through the system, assuming we get a fair weather dealt to us.

I think we will continue to build the brand, I want to build strong customer relationships, and we're working to get those customers included. And some of which will come and pick the grapes, so it's a nice way of them being included.

Will Evans: So if any farmer rang you up and said, what advice would you have for me, I'm thinking about going into wine production, what perhaps, wish you'd known at the start?

Hugo: Well I would suggest they did at least they did a bit of training at Plumpton College, to get an idea of what's involved, because it's all very well going on holiday and seeing a beautiful vineyard and sitting, wouldn't this be nice to have one of these in my garden.

But actually, to make this enterprise work, I think, you need to have some sort of involvement yourself. Because the margins are very tight, so I think if you outsource everything, you're going to probably outsource your profit.

So I think you want to be naturally interested in getting involved. I would also encourage them to visit as many vineyards as possible. And also chat to consultants like Alistair, who are in a great position to advise both whether the land is suitable, and whether they actually, and asking the right questions, whether they have the right appetite for it.

Will Evans: Howard, what do you wish you'd known at the start?

Howard Corney: That's interesting, I, I think one, we've gone into things without necessarily knowing all the answers. But actually, I have no regrets. The manner that we have always done things is little bit at a time, little bit, try, try, little bit.

I don't think I've got any regrets at all. It's down to Hugo to take this forward now, his problem.

Will Evans: That's a really good line.

So thank you very much Howard and Hugo for showing us around, we really enjoyed our visit,

Howard Corney: It's been marvellous having you.

Will Evans: So we're just finishing up at Court Garden, and it's been really obvious while we've been here, that not only have they got a lot of attention to detail, they've also got a real long-term view of the next generation coming into the business, and the importance of their part in the local community, and how they've got them involved.

It's been really interesting to me, as a farmer, to hear about the differences, but also the similarities in growing vines, as there are to other crops, such as cereal production and the challenges that they face along the way with the weather, and the climate.

As we've heard, the British wine industry is really on the up, and I think it's such an exciting venture to be involved in, and something that definitely other farmers and food producers out there could take a good look at.

And now I'm going to do my bit for the English and Welsh wine industry, by drinking a bit more before we leave.

As I mentioned earlier, NFU Mutual has a number of specialist viticulture agents. To find out about them and their tailored insurance for grape growers and wine makers, search for NFU Mutual Wine. And in the meantime, if you've enjoyed this podcast, please do subscribe, rate and review in the normal way.

And for now, from me, Will Evans, NFU Mutual, and everyone here at Court Garden in East Sussex, it's goodbye.