**The Present Tree**

<https://www.dropbox.com/s/k3dn43sf735d0zm/Present%20Tree%20-%20final.mp3?dl=0>

Will: Hi, I'm Will Evans, and this is Ahead Of The Field from NFU Mutual, exploring how farmers are growing their businesses for the future. During this series, we focused a lot on diversification and how farmers can bring in additional revenue streams alongside the traditional business.

Today we’re in Northern Ireland to see how a family have managed to build a brand new business, bringing huge benefits for them and the family farm itself. We’ll be speaking to them and finding out what the rest of us can learn from their experience. And if you want to find out more about the subject of diversification, NFU Mutual has published a report that you can download right now. Just go online and search for NFU Mutual Diversification.

So today we’ve come over to County Antrim, and I'm just a stone’s throw from Belfast International Airport. The farm is run by the Cunningham’s, and Andrew is the 13th generation of the family to be here, with just over 200 acres of sheep farming and a conservation contracting business. But it’s Andrew’s wife Catherine who we’re really here to meet, as five years ago she came up with the idea that changed their lives. It’s called The Present Tree.

Hi Catherine.

Will: So we’re stood in a beautiful spot here on the farm, what have you got going on?

Catherine: So I run The Present Tree, it’s an online shop, specialising in beautifully wrapped tree gifts. All the trees look gorgeous and are beautifully packaged, but what makes them really special is their ancient symbolism.

And this story is enclosed in the gift to make it really meaningful and connect in real life.

Will: I know you started off by doing a diversification course, what prompted that and what did you learn?

Catherine: So several year ago I had a yearning to start my own business. And I went to a DARD Course, which is the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development, and that was such a useful course to go on. I learned lots and lots of new business tools, and probably the most simple and crucial of those tools is SWAT, which stands for strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats. And I was able to apply that to any business idea I had.

Will: Okay, so how did the initial idea for The Present Tree itself come about?

Catherine: So I realised by doing my SWAT, and looking at where we were that we don’t have a huge footfall here, we don’t have a big crowd coming through, so that wasn't something we were going to use. But we do have beautiful grounds. We have the facilities for growing trees, and I decided I would combine my passion for trees, and my love of beautiful design and create The Present Tree.

Will: Wow. How much investment did you need to kick off at that early stage?

Catherine: I realised the stats of people who are starting out in businesses, the failure rate was pretty high. So I wanted to validate the business by making sales, rather than putting a huge amount of money into something. So I lowered the risk, I started with £5,000, which was just enough to … with our first website, which we have actually re-launched twice since then, but with that first website I got some online sales, and made enough money. But also used that money for our packaging and to buy in stock.

I then went to markets, school fairs, coffee mornings, charity days, and I stood there with my little table and my product, and that was a brilliant opportunity to really listen to customers, to find out what they liked about the product, and what the weaknesses were with the product, and then I adapted. And I realised that my customers loved the packaging. So that was something we really focused on.

Will: At any stage was there a real light bulb moment?

Catherine: Yes, I did have a light bulb moment. I knew that if I was going to go with my strengths, I would be creating a product rather than a service industry. And I wanted to create something really beautiful. But I didn't know what it was going to be. And I went through lots of different ideas, and then one day, we had a very dry spell in May and my husband, Andrew, who grows large trees in pots, needed a volunteer to do the watering, so I said, ‘Okay, I’ll do it.’ And I'm very glad I did, because when I was about half way through, I just looked at this beautiful tree in the pot and through, ‘Do you know, that would be a gorgeous gift.’

And by the end of the watering, I had everything in my head. I did a lot of research on what was available out there, and I actually ordered from some of the tree gift companies that I could find. And immediately I knew I could do better.

Will: Yeah. In what way?

Catherine: In a way of presentation, and also of the quality of the tree. I actually then went out onto the streets of Belfast, with a clipboard, and I asked people, random people, what … this was part of my research, I asked them what was their big struggle in finding a gift? What was the thing that annoyed them about receiving a gift? And it was a unanimous, 100% of the people said, ‘I really struggle to find a gift that’s meaningful.’ And when they receive a gift to know that the person has put thought into it.

So to make the gifts more meaningful, it just all immediately felt right for me, because I love our ancient heritage. I love Celtic mythology. And the magic of trees.

Will: Okay, so we’ve heard about it. Could you give us a tour of the place please?

Catherine: Of course, I’d love to.

Not often opened at this time of year.

Will: So we’ve just come through into the walled garden, perhaps you could describe what you’ve got going on down here?

Catherine: So this walled garden, before The Present Tree, was our orchard, now we have kind of filled it with wooden tables with all our trees, our stock basically is in lines of trays and pots. We’re really in late winter here, but in spring and summer it’s buzzing with bird song and bees and insects. It’s a really beautiful place to work, and it’s a lovely place for our trees to grow.

Will: Do you grow all the trees here on the farm?

Catherine: Yes. So all the trees come in as small saplings. And then they are potted with … we’re completely organic here, so we have an organic compost. They’re put into pots and then sorted out into every variety. Here we can see our deciduous collection, which most of them are native Irish trees. A lot of our customers would rather have something that’s evergreen, and that’s what we have adapted and grown the business into offering our customers a whole variety of trees from the more exotic evergreen like orange trees and myrtle and olive, to the native trees that are deciduous.

Will: Okay. How many different ones do you sell?

Catherine: We have about 25 different varieties now.

Will: Wow, and which is your best seller?

Catherine: Our best seller is at the moment, it does change, at the moment it’s myrtle. It’s got a beautiful symbolism of love, joy and harmony.

Will: And you’ve got such a beautiful location here, did you ever think about having a retail shop, or is that on the cards, or is that … does that not appeal?

Catherine: We don’t have a big footfall here. It’s wonderful to make use of the internet, so we might have … this morning we had someone from New York ordering a camellia gift for their mum who lives in London.

It’s also really nice to wake up in the morning and see how much money you’ve made whilst you were sleeping.

Will: I'm sure it is.

Catherine: Yeah, it’s really nice. And also I love creating an online shop that is just like a bricks and mortar shop. Visually I want our customers to find our shop online, and then enter it, browse through, and have that really … a lovely experience of looking through our products as if they were walking into a real shop. And even after, once the recipient has received their gift, we’re here. We are here for them.

Will: And you obviously enjoy the design part of it as well? You must have enjoyed building the brand itself?

Catherine: I loved that part. Actually I spend a year designing the packaging. I decided that it would be a round parcel, so it would be cylindrical. That’s the most secure way of the trees travelling.

Will: So we’re just a few miles from Belfast International Airport, we can literally hear planes taking off and landing in the background. Has that been useful for you, because your target market is obviously international?

Catherine: Yes, most of our trees go to mainland UK. It does add a certain premium on the delivery charge, and it’s something we have to live with. Delivery is one of the biggest expectations our customers have. They want to know when the tree is going to arrive, they would like it to be left somewhere safe rather than a signature. So we give the top delivery service. It’s free, it’s tracked and it’s very fast and reliable.

Will: If I ordered one tomorrow from North Wales, how quickly would a tree be with me?

Catherine: If you ordered one today, it could arrive with you tomorrow.

Will: Wow that is very impressive.

We’re just walking into the greenhouse. Tell us about some of the trees that we can see in here?

Catherine: So this is more of our exotic evergreen range. Here we have our beautiful myrtle trees. We have olive. Olive tree is known as the tree of friendship, and it symbolises peace.

And then we also have our brand new fig tree, which do you know, it’s really listening to the customers, and having an online shop is very useful because we have a search bar. I can see what our customers are looking for on our website, and then also see what we aren't giving them, that they’re looking, and fig tree is really trending at the minute. So it would have been crazy not to offer that to our customers.

Will: When people start asking for a new product like that, how easy is it to source?

Catherine: Well, I do look at all the … I look at the numbers, I look at the possibilities, but I always go back to our values. Is it a product that is going to grow and thrive and flourish in any garden? Can it grow in a pot? Are all our customers going to love it? Is it easy to grow? Is it low maintenance? And also how beautiful it is, and can we provide that consistently to our customers? And the fig tree ticked all those boxes.

Will: You’ve obviously grown really fast, really quickly, what’s been your steepest learning curve?

Catherine: Oh tech without a doubt. For me personally it’s been learning how to introduce our shop to customers online. For them to be able to see us, find us, and Google is the biggest marketing tool that we have.

Will: And those spikes in demand, did you get caught out by them in the early days?

Catherine: Oh yes. We had … sometimes it was a bit frantic here. We had an unexpected influx of orders, and it was just chaos here. We actually have somebody … a vision in heads, for every tree gift that we wrap. It’s going to the most important person in your life. So actually for Mother’s Day, that first year that went really crazy was in 2015. So no matter how busy we were, we were doing hundreds and hundreds of tree gifts everyday leading up to Mother’s Day, we never lowered our quality.

Will: So when you get moments like that, when you get very busy and big demand, has anything ever gone wrong, have you ever run out of trees, for instance? How do you go about overcoming that?

Catherine: Yes, things do go wrong, and it’s about learning why did that happen and changing it, and moving on.

One of our biggest things is outstanding customer service. So if we have somebody that is concerned about their tree, or annoyed about their delivery service, we will jump through all the hoops to flip that customer into a fan of The Present Tree. And that is just through really good, swift, prompt responses to any enquiries, any concerns that they have, our customer service has to be excellent.

Will: Have you learnt lots about customer trends and behaviour along the way?

Catherine: Absolutely, listening to your customers is the most crucial thing. Our customers have high expectations, so we really work on making sure our product fits in with those. What we’ve realised over the years is our customers want personalisation, and we now have solid brass plaques that go with our trees.

Again, you know, there’s that risk of do you invest in a big, expensive engraving machine to bring that in-house, which we did. I did the numbers, worked out that it may take us about three months to pay that machine off. Actually we did it in five weeks. And that has also fitted in with our customers’ expectation.

Will: So can we see a tree being potted up please?

Catherine: Of course, yes, so we’re standing at the potting table in the greenhouse. Laura’s our head gardener here, she will be given the picking list every morning first thing from Sorcha, who has collected the orders online that have come through overnight. And then Laura picks out, selects all the tree, brings them all to this potting table, and they’re potted into these organic, biodegradable pots.

The trees get, yeah, put into their organic pots, and then set into trays and carried up to the packaging room.

So I'm really happy to help Laura this morning and do this one for her. This is one of our camellias that is going out today. So I'm just going to check the roots, check it’s really moist. A little bit of fresh compost in there, make sure it’s secure, and then one final check, we do a 360 and just turn the tree around to check that every leaf is perfect…

Will: We’re joined here now at The Present Tree by David Harrison, one of NFU Mutual's experts on rural affairs. Are online businesses becoming more popular forms of diversification for farming families?

David H: Yeah, they definitely are. We know that over 60% of UK farmers who’ve diversified, and a number of those businesses will have an online presence. And it can be a great option as well for farmers considering diversification. It can fit in very well, an online business, with farming patterns. So if you can service those online needs at points where the farm is less busy, that can work very well. And it can be a great shop window as well for farm diversifications. So if you’ve got farm shops, holiday lets, or other events going on, they can be prompted via an online presence.

Will: And in this case, it’s obviously been a good way of adding another string to the bow of the family farm, is that a common theme in diversification?

David H: Yeah, very much. A lot of it is around trying to spread the risk and maximise income streams from other activities. And also to try and involve partners and other family members as well.

Will: What are the big things to consider from an insurance perspective?

David H: I think a key one is making sure that you are in regular contact with your NFU Mutual agent, or your insurance broker, to make sure that the cover that you’ve got in place is suitable. Especially as we’ve heard today, as the business grows and develops to make sure that the right coverage is in place.

A key thing as well is around the business description on your insurance policy, to make sure that that’s covering all the activities that you’re engaged with, and making sure that you’ve got the right liability cover in place.

Will: What should farming families give the most thought to before diving into a venture like this?

David H: I think it’s really important to thoroughly research the opportunities, and understand the market that’s out there. And we’ve seen clearly today, through Catherine and The Present Tree, the importance of doing that research, that background piece, looking at what competitors are out there and making sure that you’ve got something that’s unique, that’s really going to land with your target audience.

Will: Just before we carry on with the rest of this episode, you might like to know that NFU Mutual has published a report on diversification that you can download right now. Just go online and search for NFU Mutual diversification. And if you're enjoying this podcast, please do make sure you subscribe, so that you never miss an episode. Right, back to the program.

Will: So can we take this up to the packaging room now?

Catherine: Absolutely, let’s go and see what’s going on up there.

So here we have a brand new building that we built. We designed and built this about two years ago. And it joins our greenhouse to the office building. We have two long tables here, which are used to bring up all the freshly potted trees. So when I was designing the packaging and the gift wrap, I decided to use a more luxury bag to wrap the pot in. So here we have an organza fabric, which is transparent and gauzy. And then it’s got satin ribbons, which are tied around the stem of the tree to keep it secure in its pot.

Will: And then they go from there into these cylindrical containers?

Catherine: Yes, so the parcels are the one thing our customers absolutely love. The tree is … the tree’s very secure in the parcel. So here we have one of our coffee trees. These glossy, lush leaves all year, and we’re going to pop the card on first. Oh, and it’s also got a plaque to go with it.

And we’re now at the stage where every tree that’s going out today has been potted, has been brought up to the packaging room. Laura has put them into their organza bags. Sorcha has processed the orders and brought down all the cards and postal labels.

Sorcha: My name is Sorcha, and I work in the office and I’ve come down to help in the packaging room. So right now, once the tree’s been packaged, I bring it over to the sealing table. Lay it down. And just seal up the eco sleeve it travels in. It’s very important that the sleeve is clear, so that the customers know that they’re receiving a live tree, and the parcel needs opening as soon as possible.

Will: Sorcha, how much time do you spend in the office, and how much time do you spend down here?

Sorcha: Again it’s very similar to Laura, in that we split our time between our different locations, so she’s in the greenhouse and orchard and helps in the packaging room. I'm in the office and come down and help in the packaging room as well. It could be an hour to six hours a day, depending on what’s going on, on that day.

Will: Do you ever get any interesting or unexpected questions from customers after they’ve received their tree gift?

Catherine: Oh usually it’s just the general tree care. So we do get some customers who are a bit anxious although we have a full care guide that comes with the tree gift. So what we’ve done is created blog posts that I can direct them to and they can read all about their tree, and how to care for it. And also a bit of trouble shooting and what not to do.

Will: What happens next? Where do they go in terms of delivery?

Catherine: So part of the design of this new building, is that it’s got direct access through these arched double doors to the lane where our Royal Mail van reverses up. Some days when it’s busy, we might have five Royal Mail vans coming up and reversing up that lane and filling up until it’s absolutely full to capacity.

Will: And delivery itself, is that a big cost factor?

Catherine: The expectation our customers have for fast, reliable delivery is massive. And that we’re really happy to meet those expectations, even exceed them. So we do pay a premium for delivery, but it’s very reliable and it is tracked. The fact we’re in Northern Ireland and 95% of our parcels have to go on a plane, means we pay that extra tariff.

Will: So you will have inspired competition with this. There’ll be other people who’ve taken on the idea and run with it, how do you deal with that?

Catherine: Imitation is the greatest form of flattery, we do keep an eye on the competition. We look out for other companies that have started up with the same thing, but do you know, I don’t really focus too much on them. You can’t get distracted by other people out there. It’s just about being the best in your market. And we just are always striving to improve. We innovate a lot. Innovation is so crucial for any business to bring in new products, have new ideas, reach new markets.

Will: How much of it is anticipating trends with these things?

Catherine: Yeah, trends, we’re really into looking at social media, at Google, seeing what is going on out there. I work a lot on our search engine optimisation, which is basically allowing people to find us online. And it is just like you’ve got people walking down a high street, except they’re on Google, and I want them to see our shop front, and not just see it, but want to enter it. And then once they’ve entered, have a fabulous experience, and find something that they want to buy.

Will: So where do you see the business going in the future Catherine? Do you want to get bigger or better, or both I presume?

Catherine: So right from the beginning, our vision is to be the Interflora for trees. We want to grow a global, scalable business. We want to be a global luxury gift brand, that is the vision for The Present Tree. I'm not the most patient person in the world, so sometimes the ambition is … I can see it, and we’re just happy to take those steps along the way, and yeah, we’ll get there.

Will: We’re also joined here at The Present Tree by David McClure, the local NFU Mutual agent. David, you’ve seen this business grow from nothing, what are your thoughts on how Catherine planned and launched the business?

David M: Yeah, absolutely. I first met Catherine shortly after I joined the Crumlin Agency, which was almost eight years ago. I guess at that stage, when I came here, my main focus was to review the farm business, and focusing on her husband’s diversification within the conservation. And at that stage, Catherine’s business was very much in its infancy. But over the next coming years, it quickly outgrew the homeworker extension on our product. At that stage The Present Tree was really starting to grow and it really required bespoke attention and a policy of its own worth.

Will: And what help and advice were you able to give in those early days?

David M: I suppose I didn't really give Catherine any more help or advice than any of our other clients, but Catherine and I would have quite a close relationship, we would be in constant contact, primarily by email actually. We would correspond quite a lot, and that’s been the way our relationship has built over the years. I come here probably annually to review the covers and make sure everything’s in order. But we’re definitely in touch probably once a month via email, just touching base on different aspects of cover.

Will: And how does that relationship work from your point of view, Catherine?

Catherine: Oh it’s great to have David at the end of an email. I can just send him a one-liner and it’s done, it’s sorted out. So when, you know, the business has grown pretty quickly, we reinvest a lot of our revenue in buildings, machinery, technical stuff, computers. And it’s just wonderful to be able to send a quick email off to David and he sorts it out. So we are fully covered.

Will: Yeah, when a business grows really quick like that, you do need that extra advice, don’t you?

Catherine: Yeah, absolutely. And also David was able to say, ‘Look, your stock is worth so much more now, so we need to make sure that that’s covered just for any eventuality.’

Will: So we’ve come up to the farm now to talk to Catherine’s husband, Andrew. Perhaps you could give us a brief overview of the farm?

Andrew: Yeah, well I did agriculture at Edinburgh in view of taking over the farm, it seems like ages ago now. I came back and we had cattle and sheep, and like any sort of Northern Ireland farm, we diversified, you had to have your crops. You did a wee bit of everything. I was quite lucky because my father and grandfather before that had been interested in trees and had always planted small areas throughout the farm, whereas I wanted to do a field and I wanted a slightly bigger scale. I employed someone to come and plant trees, and then thought afterwards, ‘Golly, I could do that.’ So we then started Crookedstone Conservation, which is an environmental sort of conservation company that does all conservation aspects on farms and land owners in Northern Ireland.

Will: You mentioned your father and grandfather, your family have been here for an awful long time, haven't they?

Andrew: I think I’ve counted 13 generations, so it does take it back a bit, yes.

Will: That’s serious heritage, isn't it?

Andrew: Well, it’s heritage and a lot of responsibility. But the nice thing is you see change through the years, and it’s nice to look back and say, ‘That was done in my grandfather’s day,’ or, ‘That was done in so and so’s day,’ and it’s quite nice to see the different stages as you go through past generations.

Will: Absolutely. And the sheep are just across the yard from us. Can you tell us about them?

Andrew: Well, the sheep, unfortunately the conflict of interest perhaps with tree planting, which obviously takes place at this time of year, also coincides with lambing and calving. So something had to go and unfortunately it was the sucklers back then. We still kept on the sheep, and I try to tie in the year so that the lambing starts as soon as the tree planting finishes. It doesn't always work, but that’s the theory.

Will: When does lambing start?

Andrew: Well this year started sort of mid-April.

Will: Okay, and a very decent winter for it?

Andrew: We have had a decent winter so far, but there’s still an awful lot of tree planting to go as well. The benefits and the pushing from forest service now is carbon offsetting, it’s water mitigation, and all the benefits. Amenity is very big here as well. Northern Ireland farms are very small, and there’s a lot more of the general public that like to be able to use the countryside, and a mixture of trees and farming works very well. Especially in my situation where my pedicure Shropshires I'm able to graze underneath the trees, so the land’s getting double used.

Will: Tell us a little bit more about the Shropshire sheep?

Andrew: Yep, before that we always had the commercial flock, and I had Soay sheep, which are a lovely little sheep from the Outer Hebrides, no maintenance, you don’t sheer them, they never needed dose, they don’t need a footbath or anything like that. However they were a nightmare to catch and get into the yard.

Will: I’ll bet.

Andrew: So a few years ago we changed to a Shropshire pure breeding flock and we’re at the stage of just increasing the numbers at the moment.

Will: So what did you think when Catherine decided to start the business?

Andrew: Well, I should say I was very proud of her, because she has done this all off her own back. It started off that I went to a lecture about farm diversification in Larne, and I said, ‘That was a very good …’ it was a six week course she had to go on, and I said, ‘You must come along to the second one.’ And she did. And actually, she took on-board far more than I did. And because our interest is in trees, and I’ve done trees all my life, she thought this is a niche in the market and this is where she can diversify into something that she loves doing.

Will: And what impact have you seen it have on the rest of the farming business?

Andrew: Time wise it means I've got to then just fit in the rest of the farming year alongside our busiest, which is obviously the tree planting. It does work very well, and of course the squad of men I have for tree planting, and we have them out today, and we’re doing all the little jobs that haven't been done in the three weeks around the farm.

Will: So we’re back in the greenhouse, and chatting again to David McClure, the local NFU Mutual agent. This business isn't using any big machinery or equipment, but are there any specific risks that come with an exclusively online business like this?

David M: Absolutely. Anybody that’s trading online needs to be aware of the cyber risks. So if you’re handling peoples contact details, their payment information, you have a very serious responsibility of how you deal with that information. And it would be particularly prudent to make sure that you are protecting yourself and your business in how you handle that info.

Will: And you obviously have a close relationship with the family, Catherine now runs a highly successful business, what’s your role now in supporting that?

David M: My role is no different today than what it was whenever she initially founded the business. I’ll continue to be a contact for her. I’ll continue to provide any information, any services, any support that she needs, and just be there as we always have been within the office.

Will: With a business like this, that’s a bit different, you might not already have the expertise on it, how do you go about keeping up with that?

David M: Something we find quite often, a lot of our farms here do diversify, and no two of them will diversify exactly into the same thing. But I guess the benefit of representing the NFU Mutual is that even if we don’t know the answer, there’s always somebody up the line a little that will have heard of it. We have a great network of agents throughout the UK, and somebody else will have done it. It’s very much a can do attitude with our underwriters.

Will: So we’ve just come through to the office. Up here is a wipe board, a big list of hash tags on there, what’s all that about?

Catherine: Well, we have Charlie on the team, who works with our digital marketing, and he creates all our social media posts, and hash tags are really important for your business to allow your customers to engage with them, but to allow your customers to find you and find some inspiration for a gift.

Will: And social media platforms in general, things like Instagram, they’d be really important for your business?

Catherine: Very important, we can show them on a day-to-day basis, photographs of our trees and who’s looking after them. Sometimes customers will phone us and say, ‘Oh I just wondered what tree is the most beautiful at the moment?’ And I can actually be taking that call as I'm walking through our trees, and that’s really important for our customers. They love to know that their tree is coming from somewhere where it’s been nurtured properly. We’re not in a warehouse somewhere on an industrial estate. And it’s all part of the feeling behind The Present Tree, is that it’s come from somewhere that is really loved and nurtured.

Will: So we’ve just been on a tour around the farm with Andrew, but we’re back in the office now. Does he get involved down here at all?

Catherine: Andrew works fulltime in his own successful business, with conservation and tree planting and landscaping. So no, we have our separate businesses. It really works very well for both of us. Of course at six o’clock when we get together in the evening, it’s great to both swap stories and talk through our day with each other, and that works for us. But we do overlap with the farm, which is the third business, and yeah, I get involved as much as I can, especially at busy times like lambing.

Will: Do you enjoy that still?

Catherine: I love our lambing. I come from generations of farmers as well. So I love that side to … it’s a lifestyle that we have, and of course it has to pay for itself and we want it to be a viable business, but it’s very much part of our lives, our day-to-day lives. Our weekends are spent on the farm, but during the lambing time, yeah, it can get really busy.

Will: So the other farms we’ve visited for this podcast series have had to encourage people to come onto their farms, you don’t have people coming onto the farm, that wasn’t a route you wanted to go down. But you still have to interact with customers online, is that tricky sometimes?

Catherine: Well the reason we don’t have general public coming up to the farm is we’re remote, we’re rural, so actually we enjoy the peace that comes with that. So we have the disadvantages of being rural, but the advantages are the privacy and the peaceful environment that we live in. And I also wanted to minimise the impact my business would have on our family. So being online I feel is a huge opportunity for any business. It means that you can be found not just by local people. You have got this incredible global audience that you can invite to your shop at the click of a button.

Will: And where do you go from here, world domination?

Catherine: That’s the dream. That is the dream. So what we’re going to do is we’re going to explore other continents. At the minute it’s difficult with trees to send to … get them into other countries, some other countries in the world, I mean the journey time is a problem but also the plant import health restrictions other countries have like America. About 20% of our traffic that comes onto our website, so the visitors to our shop, come from America, Australia and New Zealand. So we’d like to be able to offer them the opportunity of receiving the gift as well as buying it for somebody else who lives in the UK or EU.

Will: And what is the balance between corporate customers and individuals?

Catherine: So the corporate market, we have discovered has been a surprising success. A few years ago we supplied Wimbledon with all their corporate gifts. They wanted strawberry plants beautifully wrapped with cards that had their logo on, the parcels had the Wimbledon logo on them. Of course that was pretty exciting.

Will: Catherine, thank you so much for showing us behind the scenes at The Present Tree, it’s been so brilliant to come here, to see your home and your business, and how it’s grown, and see your attention to detail and branding and the artistry behind it all. It’s fantastic, so thank you so much.

Catherine: It’s a pleasure, it was great to have you here.

Will: So we’re going to be on our way shortly. But what I’ll be taking away from here is not only Catherine’s superb attention to detail and passion and ambition, but also just how fantastically well this business has fitted in with the rest of the farm, and what they’ve got going on here.

I asked Catherine earlier about the scale of her ambition and it was really refreshing to hear her talk about wanting to take on the world with it, and take it worldwide. I think that was a really impressive thing to hear.

And in contrast to some of the other farms we’ve been on for this podcast series, it was really good to hear that Catherine, she didn't necessarily want the public on her farm, which is something I can relate to. But she’s made a success of the business online, I think that’s really, really interesting.

If you’ve been inspired to find out more about diversification, and see what help is out there, you can download NFU Mutual’s diversification report. Just go online and search for NFU Mutual diversification.

In the meantime, if you’ve enjoyed this podcast, please do subscribe, rate and review in the normal way.

For now, from me, Will Evans, NFU Mutual, and everyone at The Present Tree and beautiful Country Antrim, it’s good bye.