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### **Education, Passion, Perseverance an Inheritance to Rachels Dairy**

The challenges faced and overcome by three farming women over a century through the principles of sustainability.

The word sustainable is now used so frequently, politically and in so many ways, I wonder if the politicians have decided it replaces the word profitable, in order to have their policies readily acceptable. One fact is certain business is not sustainable if it is not profitable. However the dictionary definition for sustainable is given as " a system that is capable of being continued with minimal effect on the environment."

And for sustainable Agriculture " a method of harvesting or using a resource so the resources are not depleted or permanently damaged.

My grandmother Elizabeth Lyon Brown from Forfar, Angus in Scotland came to the UWA Aberystwyth in 1900 aged 21 to teach Dairy Technology in the newly founded Agriculture Department. My Grandfather Abel Edwin Jones was born on a mixed farm in Llanybydder one of 8 children born to Dinah & Thomas Jones, he left school at 12 to work on the family farm. At aged 20 he decided to go to Bangor college to gain his matriculation before entering Aberystwyth university. In 1903 he gained a 1st class degree in Agricultural Science and a National Diploma in Dairying. He was appointed Assistant Lecturer in Agriculture at Aberystwyth in that year.

From 1900-1907 grandmother lectured and also visited farms throughout West Wales offering advice on butter, cheese making and keeping poultry on their holdings. She used trains and a bicycle as her mode of transport.

In 1907 Bessie and Abel, married, and undaunted by the University policy of not employing married women she thrived on running and developing the smallholding they rented at Rhydyfelin. 2 cows on 3 acres, a walled garden growing fruit and vegetables and 20 bee hives. All produce surplus to family

requirements was sold locally. Records show she often generated a gross income greater than grandfather earned at the University!  
They had 4 children namely Gwyneth, Dinah, Alexander(Sandy) and David

In the 1st World War my grandmother was given responsibility for placing members of the women's Land Army on farms throughout Wales and awarded her MBE in 1918 for her services to the war effort. During that time she learnt a great deal about TB and health on the farms and was diligent not to place girls from the inner cities on a farm where she knew the occupants suffered TB.

In 1918 Granny travelled to Denmark with her cousin Dinah who now worked in the Dairy department of the University to study on farm butter and cheese making. Grandmother had recognised the Danes were very successful in marketing their produce with little salt compared to what was practiced in Wales. How did the Danish manage to make such good produce without the addition of salt? Her visit confirmed what she had always believed. Good hygiene practices and attention to detail were fundamental to the successful manufacturing of dairy produce and protection to our health. Following their visit they persuaded the University that cheese production had to move from next door to the gents toilets in the basement!

Just after her return from Denmark her youngest son David died from pneumonia and this had a profound effect on her. In 1919 she suffered a serious breakdown in her health, but chose to be treated in a Scottish Nature Cure clinic her brother had recommended. She returned after 3 months just in time to help with moving the family to Nancellan farm. Grandfather had now been appointed Professor of Agriculture and the University had purchased a farm to support its research work.

From 1919 -1924 my grandmother assisted with the running of the college farm and encouraged mother to help with the milking, her reward was to go to London in 1923 to compete in the London Dairy Show aged just 12, against males and females under 18. and she won!

Sadly grandfather died of Leukemia in 1924. The University at the time offered to let grandmother remain and run the farm for them but she preferred to take up the tenancy of a neighboring farm. Her mother-in-law loaned her the capital to enable her to do this. Her brother had tried to persuade her to return to teaching in Scotland to support herself and 3 children, as he didn't think she would scrape a livelihood farming in Wales. Her response was clear "I am staying in Wales" she believed she would have more respect from Welsh men than Scottish men! So in 1925 she moved to Nantllan a 66 acre holding with Gwyneth<sup>15</sup> , Dinah<sup>13</sup>, and Sandy<sup>10</sup>. She immediately developed a retail milk round in Aberystwyth and was in fact the first to introduce grade A Tuberculin Tested milk, sold fresh, raw and unpasteurised in the town.

In the 1930's she introduced Guernseys to her herd. She had visited the south west one winter on a particularly wet and windy day and been struck by the

Guernsey cows grazing happily whilst all others were sheltering in the hedges! She determined to bring a few back to West Wales that summer. Her neighbours ridiculed her when they saw these small delicate cows, and asked what she would do with them in the wintertime as she didn't have the buildings to house them. Suffice to say she had the last laugh, not only because they out-wintered, but also to the contribution they made to the cream line in her milk bottles. This had a positive impact, as she gained more customers wanting to buy her milk.

In 1930 she bought Glan-y-Mora nearby farm and moved there with my mother, leaving Sandy to run Nantllan. During the 30's she expanded her farming operation by taking on neighbouring tenancies in the Clarach valley. On every farm her priority was to install a bathroom and toilet in the farmhouse. Her visit to Denmark had instilled a lasting impression of the necessity for good hygienic facilities to prevent disease both for humans and animals.

Another first for her was encouraging those living in towns to come and stay on a working farm at weekends and summer holidays. The deal was they had free board and lodging if they worked from early morning to lunchtime! She also offered tramps shelter in the hayloft, but first taking all matches and cigarettes they may have on themselves. The following morning they were offered a hearty breakfast before they moved on.

When my mother left school following Matriculation she was needed at home to help the expanding farming operations. This suited her as she loved her cows and the farming way of life.

In 1937 my mother Dinah and father Stanley Owen Williams (son of a merchant sea captain) met following father's desire to learn to ride. He was introduced to mother because of her skills as a horsewoman. Dad studied Agricultural Chemistry at Aberystwyth University and following his graduation in the summer of 1940 he gained employment at a munitions factory in Dumfries.

Mum travelled to Dumfries for their wedding in 1941. Grandmother did not attend as during the war they were short of labour and now she was losing another worker! In 1942 Granny acquired the tenancy of Brynlllys farm, previously a beef and sheep farm of 300 acres that she set about converting to a dairy farm. Dad was released from the munitions factory in 1943 following a fire. They returned to farm Pantydwn a neighbouring farm to Brynlllys in partnership with Granny and mum's brother Sandy.

The partnership still retained the milk round in Aberystwyth and surrounding countryside and by now they had developed a milk bottling plant at Nantllan, Clarach collecting and pasteurising all the local farmers milk. In 1948 Mum and dad moved to Brynlllys from Pantydwn with Granny moving to a smaller 100acre farm Bryncastell in Bow Street. In 1952 they purchased Brynlllys from the Gogerddan estate. Mum and Dad wanted to specialise in dairy farming, their vision was to create a truly organic farm based on her parents thinking

and her experiences of working with her mother since she was a child. They dared to believe their future was safe, albeit in a farming system that was not supported financially or otherwise accepted by mainstream agricultural policy of the time. Guernseys were kept at Brynlllys and Bryncastell. I spent nearly all my holidays visiting Granny at Bryncastell she continued to milk her 30-cow herd, bottling and separating some of the milk for cream to sell until her 80th year. I really enjoyed turning the handle of the separator, and working with her in the dairy. Something I always remember about her was she never wore trousers and always wore a hat! She had a hat for milking the cows, another in the dairy and again, a smart one for when she went to town.

She encouraged us as children to work hard, often only declaring "you only get out of life what you put in" and "hard work never killed you!" Mind you after a day collecting stones or planting potatoes, I used to collapse into bed so she was saved from my incessant questions. I was a very inquisitive child! Another declaration often repeated when we walked the farm to check the stock and grass growth was her quote from her friend Sir George Stapledon the renowned plant breeding scientist and Director of the plant breeding station who Abel had worked closely with on research projects. "Two blades of grass must be grown where one grew before" but she always added "It must be from our own resources "

Now of course she and Stapleton had been friends since he first came to Aberystwyth in 1912 as an Agricultural Botanist Advisor. Her own belief in the power of nature and the need to understand that power rather than master it, was also a philosophy she shared with Stapleton. She often said farmers were enjoying good times, but the high artificial inputs will deliver long term payment and ultimately suffering for the farmer. You will appreciate I was too young to understand what she meant at that time.

In 1952 my parents met Lady Eve Balfour founder of the Soil Association at the Royal show. They invited her to visit Brynlllys that year, as they were so impressed by her work and writings. They became members and developed a long working relationship and friendship that saw mother elected as a council member of the Soil Association in the 60's.

In 1965 Gareth and I were married and in 1966 invited to return and farm in a partnership. Sadly for us all Daddy died a few months after our return so we farmed in partnership with mother. Like my parents, we also raised our children on the farm; paddling our own canoe against the conventional flow. We were hardly back woodsmen, like many young farmers, we enthusiastically accepted the challenges. New buildings, bank loans and development plans for the future were part of those years, but we were always mindful to work with nature, respecting the seasons and cycles always questioning and assessing modern commercial pressures against first principles.

During the early 1980's we found that we had to consider the future of our children. Maybe many of you have read the website and are familiar with the story of the snows of 1982 and the introduction of milk quotas in 1984. So out

of adversity came an opportunity. For a long time I had been conscious that our organic milk was simply treated the same as any other milk, with no premium for its pure organic quality. There was no recompense and thus little incentive or benefit to farmers for the extra care and staff resources undertaken to ensure a herds wellbeing. Having decided to diversify, the challenge next was to develop a product on organic principles, using fresh ingredients without additives or enhancers.

We had good quality milk from our Guernsey herd of cows but how could we create a premium for an organic yogurt in competition with cheap and aggressively marketed food produced to a price? We based our entire business on the premise that consumers do in fact appreciate natural goodness, that taste counts and given the choice consumers would be willing to pay extra for a quality product.

In terms of progress, the brand name Rachel's Dairy was established in 1984. After a few years it became patently obvious that to fulfill our ambition to bring quality organic yogurt to consumers via supermarkets, we would need a clear and professional corporate identity. We were fortunate to be awarded a DTI funding grant to develop a corporate identity for the range of organic products we were producing that included creams, butter, buttermilk, yogurt both natural and fruits in 1986. A local designer Dave Parkin from Newcastle Emlyn, was commissioned. The decision to go all the way with a multi-coloured corporate identity, although very expensive, proved without doubt to be correct. The triangle design with Rachels Dairy on the side of the triangle was explained by Dave Parkin, as a company climbing a mountain, with the summit to be achieved

Within a few years we were planning our move from the farm to a modern , purpose built dairy in order to satisfy food legislation and further encourage more farmers to produce organic milk to meet the growing demand. In 1992 we moved off farm and again extended the dairy substantially in 1996. The following 2 years saw spectacular growth, restrained only by a shortage of organic milk and the ability to expand the dairy fast enough!

In 1997, ten years on from our first corporate design project we felt it was time for a change. We commissioned four design companies, two Welsh and two English, to create a new design concept in order to take us, and organics into the new millennium. We were so pleased that the now proven, successful black pot was created in Wales. The chosen company's rationale for choosing black was down to an overall strong image associated with quality and sophistication. Although black is not traditionally an environmental colour associated with dairy products, it looked smart and modern enough to carry off the organic message that modern farming should be steering its future toward. The design certainly made Rachels stand out from the crowd as a truly high quality organic product.

For me personally developing the recipes for Rachel's Dairy became a quest to ensure we met consumer perspectives and to establish the principles of organic food products. In one sense I was seeking to manufacture pure

andsafe food with a superior taste, which is nutritionally beneficial for the consumer. This meant using certified raw organic ingredients and devising a process aimed at retaining natural goodness and organic integrity. I refused to make yogurt with powdered milk. I also rejected the use of milk powder as a stabiliser or thickener, believing the consumer does not want water and reconstituted dried milk.

Organic principles are not new, they are the foundations from which we have all originated, they are based on sustaining and respecting life on the planet, understanding the intricate balance between man and nature. We are not two separate entities but intertwined in a relationship that cannot be separated, they are based on cycles that will continue forever, not on resources that will eventually run out.

Quality milk from our Guernsey cows allowed us initially to develop the market. As a dairy farmer, quality is about the constituent values of fat and protein, these are of prime importance in the production of a final product that consumers will enjoy and buy again. I do believe we must encourage all organic dairy farmers to consistently produce quality milk that consumers will benefit from, thus farmers should be rewarded on a quality basis. Good quality organic produce should have an integrity, which is reflected in taste and sensory satisfaction. However as demand grows so does commercial opportunities and it is in this respect I fear that principles of organic food production may be compromised. Retailers are driven by profit and the need to satisfy the changing and fast moving needs of consumers. To meet this, food manufacturers develop organic lines of fast food and convenience products.

I believe, if too many highly processed ingredients are included, food values, and thus the integrity of organic food is compromised. The drive will be to find short cuts to provide greater profit and convenience rather than using fresh ingredients to produce fresh wholesome organic food. Of course you may argue that dried or reconstituted organic ingredients are preferable to non organic. However it raises the serious issue that less sophisticated consumers will be led to buy organic products believing they have all the attributes of fresh organic produce, whereas in fact there will be two categories of organic food, the pure and the highly processed.

I knew we produced safe food, in that the milk, our major ingredient had been produced without pesticides or routine use of antibiotics. However food safety is a serious management issue in terms of processing and has to be addressed by ever more stringent legislation, training and hygiene rules. As a company we had been advocating strongly, the need for industry specific training to be available. I would argue that despite increased sophistication in the plough to plate food chain (not to mention it's vast economic role) there has been little encouragement in schools and further education to promote careers in the food industry, especially at the technician level. We had to rely on in house training in the company with reward and recognition playing an important role. Food production demands high caliber, intelligent staff at all levels to meet the huge responsibilities food production entails. I would ask

you to question why teaching about food production and domestic science has diminished in our schools? Paradoxically, this is at a time when consumer interest is at an all time high, watching fashionable chefs and cookery writers on popular TV's programs. I would like to see more courses and qualifications for today's complex Dairy and Food industry.

In 2004 I submitted a research application to identify whether there are components in milk of our traditional breeds that may offer advantages in the production of yogurt. I believed that through carefully targeted research benefits could be identified. Research has confirmed increased beneficial fatty acids in organic milk, but do traditional breeds offer further benefits such as A2 milk. Australia and New Zealand have led on the research, development and marketing of A2 milk and its health giving benefits. I see it has at long last been introduced in the UK.

I referred earlier on our mission to explain and therefore our marketing approach had been to stake out a distinctive place in the market place. As part of this we invested substantially in modern packaging and promotional activities to raise consumer awareness of our yogurt as a quality product, believing that good quality products must be presented to the consumer in a way that reflects their integrity and value. The basis of Rachel's Dairy marketing was driven by a passion to explain organic principles, to tell the story and to produce a product consumers believe in. We need to make clearer the links between the environmental benefits of organic farming and organic food. Organic is not just about food free from poisonous chemicals but it is a system of food production that benefits us all.

These issues bring me neatly back to a quote from Lady Eve Balfour. She wrote

"Man's environment is the source of his food and of his experience - mental, social and spiritual, and unless both man and his environment are obeying the biological law of mutual synthesis, there can be no health.

And finally to a poem called "The Land" written by George Henderson in his book *The Farming Ladder* published in 1943.

Time is short I'll make it brief  
It's all I've got to say  
You cannot have your cake and eat it,  
The world's not made that way

But we invented science, and said  
Muck would do for fools  
The world could live on artificials  
And a few synthetic rules

For us, no need to labour  
Goodbye to thought and care.  
The back room boys had found the answer  
They were making muck from air.

Twenty pounds of nitrogen  
A gas you cannot see  
And our crops would start and flourish  
Like the biblical bay tree.

One thing they had forgotten  
You cannot fool the land  
There's something else that's needed  
Before the crops will stand.

The source of living matter  
The product of it all  
And the real vital factor  
Is the Humus in the Soil.

You have got to put it in  
Before you take it out,  
And nature never left us  
With that vital fact in doubt.

When you complete the cycle  
You observe the mystic rule  
The land, the stock and humus  
Are working there for you.

Two individuals who had a big influence on my parents and my upbringing over the years. Their quotes are as relevant and as important today as they were then.

I am so pleased and proud that Rachel's is now a global brand employing over 120 at the plant in Aberystwyth. Such an important contribution to the economy in rural Ceredigion. Thank you for the opportunity to tell the story behind the brand Rachels Dairy.