

Factors affecting farming

Revision Points:

- Farming in the UK varies from region to region. The type of agriculture is strongly influenced by physical factors of climate relief and soils.
- Human factors such as labour, capital, distance to market, tradition and politics also affect the pattern of agriculture.

Helicopter tour

Captain Chambers: helicopter pilot

Mr Davies: supermarket food buyer

Captain Chambers: Welcome to Newquay airport. I understand you want to go for a helicopter tour over some of the farms that supply your supermarket?

Mr Davies: That's right. We need to be able to tell our customers where our food comes from. People are always complaining about how far their food has travelled and I'm keen to show that our supermarket buys as much British food as possible.

Captain Chambers: OK, we're taking off now. We're heading North West. Do you see those blue and white buildings below you now? That's the creamery at Davidstow. It makes Cathedral City Cheddar - 55,000 tonnes of cheddar cheese a year! 500 local dairy farms provide the milk that's needed.

Mr Davies: Yes – you can see the farms. They are quite small, aren't they? And the fields are so green! I suppose that must be down to the amount of rain this part of Cornwall gets?

Captain Chambers: I would imagine so. With the sea being so close, and prevailing winds from the south west, this part of Britain gets plenty of rain. It never gets that cold though, so the grass grows all year round. It must be the ideal place for dairy farming.

Mr Davies: OK lets head up to South Wales, I'd like to see a farm near Abergavenny in the Brecon Beacons. We're thinking of buying beef and lamb from there. Apparently they have a herd of Red Devon cattle that make lovely organic beef and the Welsh Mountain lamb is a delicacy.

Captain Chambers: We're almost there now. It's quite easy to find, I'm just following this valley. The hills are a lot higher here. The farm should be below you now.

Mr Davies: Oh great, I can see the lambs on the side of the mountain there. I bet it gets very cold in winter! It doesn't look as though they can use the steep land for anything apart from sheep.

Captain Chambers: It must be an organic farm. I don't think they need to use many chemicals here – the grass is really long and green like the fields we flew over in Cornwall. Look you can see the cattle there, in one of the small fields at the foot of the mountain side – that's the inbye land I believe. I think we should consider buying meat from this farm. The only problem is that it's quite a long way from our shops in London and Birmingham. I suppose we can charge a bit extra for seasonal produce if it's very high quality!

Captain Chambers: You wanted to go east towards London next, Surrey or something?

Mr Davies: Yes there's a market garden I want to have a look at. It grows salad leaves and herbs. You'll recognise it by the glass greenhouses. In fact the whole farm is almost all under glass. It's not too far from London either which is ideal really because fresh salad leaves don't travel well and can perish quite quickly.

Captain Chambers: Ah, I think we're getting closer. Is that the one?

Mr Davies: Yes – wow it's tiny. Just a couple of small fields and those greenhouses. It's a very intensive farm, all the salad leaves have to be picked by hand so I guess there must be a lot of workers. Funny how it's located right in the middle of the village! I suppose that's easy for the workers to get to though. Although from here I can see the farm is pretty close to the M25 motorway as well. That should help reduce the delivery times. What a perfect location. Just one more farm to visit now. Can you please head up towards Cambridge?

Captain Chambers: No problem – the land is getting so flat now you should be able to see the farm from a long way off. It seems to be much sunnier here than over in Cornwall. Is that the place you wanted to have a look at?

Mr Davies: That's the one. Look at the size of those fields – they're enormous aren't they? And the land is so flat. That must make it a lot easier for machines I suppose. This farm mainly grows wheat and sugar beet; I suppose the warm summers here help to ripen the crops. They also grow potatoes and peas. They seem to be planting some hedges down there. I think that's because farmers have to create more areas for wildlife and look after the environment if they want to receive their Single Farm Payments from the government.

Captain Chambers: Look at that machine though. It looks as if it's spraying chemicals. They're obviously not that worried about the environment.

Mr Davies: Farms like this have to use fertiliser and pesticides in order to get the best possible crop. Prices for arable crops aren't very high and a lot of the farms around here are owned by large companies so there's a lot of competition. I've heard that this farm was thinking of renting some of the land out to a power company to put one or two wind turbines in the hedgerows. That'd earn the farmer a bit more money, and the fields are so large that not many people would be able to see or hear the turbines.