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English for Life in the UK

Episode 26 - Land Use and Farming in the UK

[Note that in this transcript we have included both the numerical figures (e.g. 50%) and the words (fifty percent) for most of the numbers used. This is to help those of you wanting to practice your numbers in English]

(Mark) Hello and welcome to Episode 26 of the podcast English for Life in the UK. This podcast is for intermediate-level learners of English and is produced by a group of volunteer teachers from the St. Augustine's Centre, in Halifax, Yorkshire, where we provide a range of support and advice to those in need and particularly to asylum seekers, refugees and migrants. We hope that this podcast will help any of you wanting to improve your English and at the same time learn more about life in this country. We believe it's important for you to listen to a range of native speakers, talking in an everyday way about a number of subjects. We choose subjects which we hope will be of general interest but also may help those of you who want to become British citizens and will need to take a British Citizenship test at some stage. You can find links to other episodes and the transcripts at our website:
www.staugustinescentrehalifax.org.uk

Here you can also find out more about the Centre, the support that's available and, for any of those of you that can afford it, how to make a donation to help keep our work going. Today's episode is brought to you by Christine, Sheena and Mark and is concerned with the use of the land in the UK and in particular, with farming and a bit about food. We hope you find it helpful and interesting.

(Christine) Well, this time we're going to talk about land use in the UK and farming, and I thought I would start by asking you both - and the listeners, of course - a question, just to invite you to guess, in this country, in the UK, how much of the land is taken up by ...by cities and towns - how much is built on, how much is farming land and how much is **wild** land, just wild - so, **wilderness**. So: towns and cities, farming or wilderness. So what percentage - I'll ask you - would you like to guess? - Mark, do you want to have a guess?

(3 minutes:02 seconds)

(Mark) OK, I'll have a guess - so this is the UK - so that includes Scotland - and that does make a big difference, I think - so I would guess that erm ... the built up, the urban areas: towns and cities, would be quite small - I would think it might be 10% (*ten per cent*) maybe, something like that. And then I would think, farming is probably 40% (*forty per cent*) and then 50% (*fifty per cent*) is wild, uncultivated, and un-built up. That's my guess.

(C) Thank you, Mark. What about you, Sheena?

(Sheena) Well, I have no idea really. But I will take a **wild guess** - I would say, maybe 30% (*thirty per cent*) built up - maybe 30% (*thirty per cent*) equally, for farming - which leaves then 40% (*forty per cent*) for wilderness.

(C) Thank you. Well, of course, I'm going to tell you that you're both wrong! But I wonder how the people who are listening got on with that, as well. In fact, at the moment, it's only 6% (*six per cent*) of the country that is built on. It seems more, of course, because most of us live in towns or cities, but it's only 6% (*six per cent*); 57% (*fifty seven per cent*) in the UK is given over to farmland - so that's more than half is farmland. And the wild, the wildness: it's not all of the rest, but 35% (*thirty five per cent*) - that's over a third - is wild, natural land, and the other little bit - 3% (*three per cent*) is made up from green spaces within towns and cities, so the parks in towns, for example, and the golf courses or whatever.

Now here in Calderdale, it's a bit different. We're quite built on in this part of the country: 11% (*eleven per cent*) of Calderdale is built on, but instead of having 57% (*fifty seven per cent*) of farmland, (in the UK), we only have 35% (*thirty five per cent*) farmland and that's because half - 50% (*fifty per cent*) of Calderdale - is wild land. I mean, as I'm recording, I can look out of the window and see the moors there. There's a lot of that.

Well, of the farmland, I wanted to talk a bit more about that. So, there's slightly more in the UK is pastureland, that means it's used for grazing animals, so: sheep, cows, pigs, and so on. So 29% (*twenty-nine per cent*) is pastureland and 27% (*twenty-seven per cent*) is arable - that means, used for growing crops.

(6:12)

Most British farms are run and managed by small families - they are small, family businesses - more than 90% (*ninety per cent*); and, nearly two-thirds of the food eaten in this country is grown in this country and two-thirds of farms also run other businesses - things like bed and breakfasts, farm shops,

(M) ...camp sites

(C) Camp sites, there you are... whatever. Do you know what the most common crop is in the UK?

(S) Rape Seed Oil?

(C) No - although it's a big one. It's wheat...

(M) I was going to say wheat. Of course I was.

(C) It's wheat - wheat is the biggest crop, but potatoes - 5.5 (five and a half) million (5,500,000) tons of potatoes each year. But that's a lot less than it was 50 (*fifty*) years ago.

In terms of the animals that are bred in this country and farmed, we have 5.5 (five and a half) million (5,500,000) cattle - that means cows - and 61% (*sixty-one per cent*) of those are for milk, so they're kept as dairy cattle, and the other 39% (*thirty nine per cent*) are for meat.

We have nearly 4 (*four*) million (*4,000,000*) pigs - yes - surprising.

But we have a whole lot more sheep. 15.8 (*fifteen point eight*) million (*15,800,000*), nearly 16 (*sixteen*) million (*16,000,000*) sheep in this country, but that's nothing compared to the chickens. There are over 90 (*ninety*) million (*90,000,000*) chickens farmed in this country for food - actually a third of those are for eggs - they're laying hens, they're kept for eggs - and the other two-thirds are kept to eat. Then we have some horses, some deer, now, and some goats are kept. So that's really a picture of agriculture in this country.

(8:58)

(M)

Oh, that's really interesting, Christine. I was going to say a bit more about j... Those of you who listened last week: we talked about climate change and one of the things that we talked about there was how meat farming, in particular, was not particularly good for the environment, and so I'm going to do a bit more about that, having done a little bit more research on it, since then. And, it is ... the scientists are pretty clear now that plant-based agriculture - so the growing of crops and the growing of food that can be eaten by humans, rather than by animals, is a much more environmentally-friendly form of farming. Animal farming takes up over 80% (*eighty per cent*) of all farmland - throughout the world - so that's not the UK, that's a figure for the world, as a whole, which is higher, I think, than the figure I think you were saying, Christine, for the UK, probably. But, of course, we also have to think about the crops that are grown simply to feed the animals, and so that 80% (*eighty per cent*) includes that - *that* includes the crops grown for animals. And, although it's true that more naturally-fed animals - so those that graze on grass, for example, and on natural crops - although they are better for the environment than, what we would call, intensive meat farming - so that's when you have very large numbers, sometimes called factory farming, very large numbers of animals that are bred, very specifically for meat in a lot of cases, but also for dairy, as you said, Christine, as well, but it is still the case: that, even with very small scale grass-fed animals, the emissions from those is still considerably higher than is the case for plant-based food.

(C)

Can you remind me what you mean by the emissions?

(M)

OK - yes - thank you - so that is the gases. We talked about "greenhouse gases" which are those gases - particularly, carbon dioxide - which get released into the atmosphere, that's the gases around the earth, and which trap in some of the heat and lead to the climate changes that we've talked about. So, it's those emissions which are things that we've got to pay a lot of attention to as a planet and there's little doubt that more pasture land - that pasture land, sorry, is part of the problem.

(12:13)

So it's not simply the animals themselves, it's also that land which is put aside for the animals and that a move towards more natural vegetation would reduce by something like 15% (*fifteen per cent*) the amount of greenhouse gases that were released. There's something like a billion (*1,000,000,000*) cattle across the whole world that are bred for eating and they - cattle, produce a huge amount of what's called methane: that's a particular gas that comes from cattle and it's a very powerful greenhouse gas.

It's one of the ones that traps more of the heat than anything else and although it is short-lived in that the methane that is from an individual animal doesn't last very long - as long as we're producing and breeding lots and lots more animals, so we get lots and lots more methane from that. So I think - I thought that was interesting. It certainly convinced me that I ought to look at my diet and I ought to think about having more food that is plant-based. I don't think I'd want to give up meat altogether because I like it too much, but it does make me think about that and I think, Sheena, you've got some more to say about that, haven't you?

(S) Well, I have some things to say about that. I looked at vegetarianism and veganism mainly, because I try not to eat meat and for 30 (*thirty*) years I have rarely eaten any meat at all, because I like animals and I've always had this erm.... I know it doesn't always make sense, but just don't like the idea of eating animals because I like to look at them and I don't like the idea of eating flesh. But also, I think in recent years - and I think that's why vegetarianism and, particularly veganism, has become very much a lifestyle for a lot of young people, because of videos and 'phones and things - now a lot of people have seen footage of factory farms - of these huge farms where cows never, ever, go out into the fields, never see any grass, have very miserable lives. A lot of people have seen slaughterhouses where you know the way animals are killed is not very good. Some of this will be in the UK, but maybe it's not all in the UK. Maybe the UK farming is slightly better than the rest of the world, at the moment.

(15:16)

(C) Can I just chip in there? If you're going to say that, but the welfare standards are quite high in British farms and, in fact, in Europe generally, but right now, because we've left Europe, we're renegotiating trade deals, for example, with America, and that might lead to a drop in welfare standards and there's a lot of concern about that, at the moment.

(S) Yeah [Yes] - I think it could be a very real problem, couldn't it? Erm ... Interestingly, to do with vegetarianism, you know, I think a lot of people know that places like India, because of religious reasons, have been vegetarians since the eighth century BC (*before Christ*) and it's taking us a little bit longer to catch up with them, but I think maybe from the '60s [*1960s, nineteen sixties*] in this country, there's been a very, very active interest in people leading vegetarian lifestyles. The Vegetarian Society was actually created in 1847 (*eighteen forty-seven*) but, and then the vegan There was a splinter group in 1944 (*nineteen forty-four*) and they became the Vegan Society, that still exists now.

(M) Perhaps you can just ... can you remind us, Sheena, what the difference is, between vegetarian and vegan?

(S) I think there are lots of different kinds of vegetarians around, aren't there? But generally, I think, that people who would describe themselves as vegetarian don't eat meat, but will still, probably, eat dairy products, whereas vegans are definitely non-dairy vegetarians. And strict vegans would abstain from all animal products, including honey, wool, leather, so it would go even beyond the food that is produced from the animal.

(M) Yeah - thank you.

(S) So - in 2018, there was a "Go Compare" study which suggested that 7% (*seven per cent*) of the Brit ...the UK population, was vegan and 14% (*fourteen per cent*), vegetarian. Now the Vegan Society refutes that and said that it was probably less than 2% (*two per cent*) of the UK population that was vegan, at the time, but, from then - they did an extended research and they found that 37% (*thirty seven per cent*) of people in 2018 - and that will have gone up by now - were eating less meat and about 20% (*twenty per cent*) of people were eating less dairy, two years ago, so veganism has, they say, quadrupled, between 2014 and 2018 - so it's definitely a growing lifestyle choice.

(M) Now I think maybe we should just surface the health issues here as well. Because it's pretty clear that particularly red meat is not good for your health generally, and that people who eat a lot of red meat are high .. much more susceptible to heart attacks and strokes and cancer, I believe, as well, is linked to red meat. I think there is some debate about exactly how much, but I think it's generally recognised, whereas white meats are slightly better. Fish is better - in fact, fish is actually quite good for you, in terms of health - most types of fish, anyway. But in particular, pulses, and beans and vegetables and fruit - that's, that's a key part of a healthy diet, so as well as the arguments that are to do with climate change, as well as the arguments that are about animal welfare, there's the simple argument that actually fits we want to be more healthy both for us as individuals, but also for society, as a whole, so we don't put so much pressure on our health service and hospitals and so on. There is a very strong argument, I think, for people moving, in terms of how and what they eat.

(20:09)

(C) I mean, what you've been saying, Sheena, and Mark, you know I'm very happy to agree with you: I'm sure what you're saying is true. But, I want to put in a note of caution here, to say that they're controversial issues in this country. There are many people who cling to their meat - meat-plenty diet - and they're not going to give it up in any short time and they will argue strongly against what you say, although I do accept that what you are saying is true, but it is controversial.

(M) Yes - as with all things, with this podcast, we are expressing our opinions aren't we, about things? We try to back them up with facts and evidence where we can, but some of these things are issues over which people will disagree.

(C) I wonder what the people who are listening think of that.

(M) Yes - we would like to hear from you.

Language Support

(M) This is the part of the podcast where I choose a few of the phrases and words in the episode and explain them in a little more detail.

One thing to notice in this episode is that we have used a lot of numbers - we have used percentages (%) - so that is numbers out of a hundred (100). We have used numbers that are simple, but also large numbers - in millions (1,000,000s) and even billions (*one thousand millions* - 1,000,000,000s). In order to help you with this, in the transcript, we have included both the numerical form of the number - that is, using the figures - and the written form of the number, as well. We hope that will be helpful to those of you still practising your English numbers.

I wanted, then, to talk about a few words that are similar or based on a single word and that is the word "**wild**". So you've ... we've talked a lot about **wild areas** of the country, we talked about **wildlife**, we talked about **wilderness** and we talked about **re-wilding**. These are all based around the word **wild**. Something that is wild is something living or growing in the natural environment; that is, something that has not been grown by human beings and animals that are not being looked after or bred by human beings - by farmers, for example. An area can be described as **wild** if it is uninhabited - that is, nobody lives there - or very few people live there, or is uncultivated - that is, nothing is growing there that has been planted by humans.

(23:57)

The word **wildlife** is usually referred [referring] to animals, insects and birds that are living wild - that is, are natural to the country, the environment, where they are living, and have not been reared or bred by humans, or tamed as in pets by humans, so the **wildlife** of the United Kingdom are those animals, birds and insects that naturally live without the help of humans in this country.

Then we have **wilderness**. The word wilderness refers to areas where there are no people or very few people living. There are large parts of Scotland, for example, which would be described as **wilderness** areas.

Then another word that we used was **re-wilding**, and that is where land that has been used for farming, or possibly for the building of places by humans, is turned back into its natural wild form, where the plants and the animals - the wildlife of the area - will be allowed to naturally develop without the involvement of human beings.

It is worth noting that there are other uses of the word wild : for example, you can describe a person as being **wild**, or a person's behaviour as being wild. That means 'out of control'. We can also say that the weather is **wild** - that usually means stormy - lots of wind and rain.

Finally, I wonder if you noticed another use of the word **wild** in this episode. At the beginning of the episode, when Christine posed us a question and asked us to guess what we thought the proportion of land was used for different things, Sheena said "well I don't really know, I'll take a **wild** guess". Now, a wild guess is a guess not based on any real information - you really don't have any idea about the answer, so you guess but that guess might be very wrong or it might be right, you just don't know. The opposite kind of guess would be called an 'educated guess' so that means a guess which is based on some information - something you already know - and that

kind of guess is more likely to be right, more likely to be nearer to the answer, because it is an educated guess, based on some previous information you already have.

That's it for this week. I hope you've found this a useful exercise and we will be back with you, with another episode, very soon. Goodbye for now. Stay Safe.