



DIARY OF AN ENTREPRENEUR

Sausages, stress and swarms of salivating women: a week in the life of Wilfred Emmanuel-Jones, The Black Farmer.

Wurst-case scenario

After another gruelling week, I was relieved to be taking a leisurely drive along the motorway, glad that I didn't have anything special on that evening. One of those very rare weekends of having absolutely no commitments.

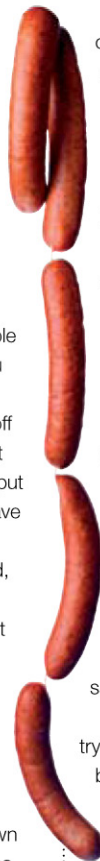
Just as I was allowing myself to relax, my mobile phone rudely interrupted me. "Where are you, Wilfred? There are hundreds of people here who have turned up to hear you talk about The Black Farmer brand."

The shock almost saw me drive off the road. Somehow, a very important talk I was meant to give hadn't been put in my diary. An error like that could have massive consequences.

I love giving talks about my brand, and I think it's very important to take every opportunity to go out and meet potential customers. I've always been of the view that a happy consumer is the most important sales person you could ever ask for – and a pissed-off consumer is the worst enemy you can have. I spent the following days trying to track down the people who attended the event so that I could send them letters of apology and free gifts. What a cock-up.

People's Choice Awards

The end of the year was chock-a-block with parties and awards ceremonies. Entering awards is always time-consuming and hard work, so the chances of winning and the future benefit has to be substantial to be worth all that effort.



The problem with most awards ceremonies is that they are too long and, more often than not, boring. There must be someone out there who could devise a ceremony that is short and interesting. The only way to get over the boredom of the awards is if you are lucky enough to win.

A hard day's night

Supermarket buyers are the gods in my business. Without them choosing to stock my products, I have no business.

My first meeting for the day was at 10.30am. It's such a long way up to Bradford and Leeds from Devon so this trip had to be organised like a military operation. I had to see three separate buyers at Morrisons in two different offices in separate parts of Bradford, before travelling to Leeds to see the new sausage buyer at Asda.

I almost gave myself a heart attack trying to catch the 6pm train home. My body was resisting like mad my attempts to drag it to that all-important train. But the promise of giving myself a couple

of hours rest did the trick. I got the train but I lied to my body: I had to spend the whole journey brushing up on current affairs because I was due to talk on Richard Bacon's BBC Radio Five Live programme that night. By the time the interview was

over, it was 1am – at which point my body decided it wasn't going to be conned any more! The next thing I remember was the taxi driver shaking me to wake me up. At last, I had arrived home.

Sultan of the sausage

There are certain things that make being an entrepreneur worth all the stress and strain. For me, it's being surrounded by 2,000 women all vying for my sausages. The Mary Howard shows are the perfect opportunity for me to meet my customers in person. These annual events are where people come in their thousands to buy my products, but also to chat with me about The Black Farmer brand.

What's touching is that these people are genuinely interested in the progress of the company. They enjoy my products and actively seek them out in stores – and they want to be sure that they are going to be able to do this in the future.

This powerful army of women either mother me or are ready to bash up the horrid supermarkets who dare to not stock my products. I have to say, I do relish this annual chin tickling – pure indulgence. At the end of the show, I go

away with a boosted ego and the knowledge that these women are all prepared to do battle if anyone dares to mess with their Black Farmer.

"It's worth all the stress when I'm surrounded by 2,000 women all vying for my sausages"

Wilfred Emmanuel-Jones is founder of The Black Farmer brand.
www.theblackfarmer.com

REAL SALES

HOW I SOLD TO... SUPERMARKETS

Wilfred Emmanuel-Jones hasn't just broken racial boundaries. He also got his Black Farmer sausages onto supermarket shelves just six months after launching.

Most sausages you buy in this country are pretty revolting. The manufacturers try and save money by using a crappy end of pork and packing them full of breadcrumbs or any other cheap filler. We only use prime cuts of meat and our sausages are 90 per cent pork. That's pretty rare by sausage standards. We are raising the bar and catering to the consumer: their stomachs *and* tastebuds.

I don't get up at dawn, and I don't get my hands dirty – I'm a gentleman farmer. I have a farm manager who deals with the livestock. My role focuses on the brand. I've got a background in marketing and I ran a big label agency in London that I sold to buy West Kitcham Farm. A lot of farmers are giving up farming, but that didn't put me off. Firstly, it meant that I got the place for a good price, plus I've always believed that where there's change, there's opportunity. I just had to find a new way of doing things.

My farm is small, only 40 acres,



WHY ARE YOU "THE BLACK FARMER"?

I was born in Jamaica and brought up in Birmingham with my eight brothers and sisters. As the eldest I was put in charge of the family allotment, and that's when I decided I wanted a farm of my own. I've had that dream since I was 12 years old, and now at 48 I have finally achieved it.

When I moved to the country, people were shocked. They had never seen a black farmer before. I named the brand The Black Farmer because that's what the locals called me. Not just to capitalise on the familiar name, but to show people that the brand was a pioneer, and the first of its kind.

and the business only employs six people, but we've made a big impact and we notched up a £600,000 turnover in the first year. I keep a very public profile, travelling around the country to over 100 agricultural fairs and food shows a year. I'm on the front line convincing people to

try my sausages. (You have to practically ram them down their throats before they'll consider spending money.) We experimented with six different recipes, and the three now available in the shops are the ones that proved most popular with the public. In all, we spent £250,000

on marketing up front before I sold a single sausage.

We started selling the sausages in farm shops and delis, building up a fan base while trying to contact the big name supermarkets. I sent emails, letters, knocked on doors. **One tactic that really worked was when we launched the online petition through the Black Farmer website.** Visitors select the supermarket they shop in most often, and they can then send the supermarket an email. It reads: "I regularly use your supermarket as my local store, but as a fan of The Black Farmer sausages I am amazed to find that you do not stock them. Please will you start stocking my favourite brand of sausages?" This forced the supermarket buyers to take us seriously.

I always planned for the Black Farmer brand to be supermarket-led. Our products are what I call affordable premium. They're either the same price as an own label sausage, or only a few pence more. Ironically, we originally set

our sights on Waitrose to be a leading stockist, and they were the last company to sign up. Asda listed us in the first six months. They have a really good regional sourcing policy and are also conscious of the rising trend for "slow food": products that are ethically produced, locally sourced and support small farmers, like myself. The other supermarkets quickly followed suit. Eighteen months in, we're now predicting £1.7m in sales for our second year – an increase of 200 per cent.

Where do we go from here? I'm on a crusade. Own-label brands con people that all sausages are equal. I need to continue to educate people that **the humble sausage, the stalwart of the English breakfast, can be more than just an assortment of eyelids and arseholes.**

But my crusade is not just about my sausages. It's about distribution and connection. Governments and councils don't seem to understand that supermarkets hold the ultimate power: convenience.

What will make them change? The role will probably fall to consumers, as it always does. And their attitudes are changing. I learned that when I worked for the BBC's *Food and Drink* programme. People now want to know how far their food has travelled, and have a relationship with the people produce their food. What I'd advocate is an optional policy whereby 25 per cent of all produce sold through the supermarkets comes from local and regional suppliers. Eventually, we should make it mandatory.

I'm passionate about my products and I'm living my dream so I've no plans to get out any time soon. I want to expand the company and use our profits to take the brand to the US – raising the pigs there, of course, not flying our products over. America's going to be a hard nut to crack, though. They're very sensitive to colour, so it'll be interesting to see the response we get.