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Digging 'Black Farmer' image

Q How did The Black Farmer name come about?

A From my neighbours in Devon. I was the only black person for miles around in the Launceston area and I'm the only farmer in the whole South West who is black. That's how people described me.

Q You run a public relations company in London. How much time do you spend on your 30 acres at St Giles on the Heath?

A I am here [on the farm] as often as I can. I only feel at home when I am on the farm. I had a meeting in Bradford today which meant I had to get up at 3am so I could do the journey from here.

Q But you've got the other business. Are you a real farmer or is this just playing, like the American 'dude cowboys', the wealthy city dwellers who spend weekends in the country?

A There are all types of farmers like there are all types of farms. I have Charolais and Belgian blue beef cattle, and in the winter, sheep. But it's bloody hard work and I've stuck at it for seven years now. Many a city boy has come and played at farming, found out what hard work it is and packed up. They don't stick around. I feel this part of the world is my home.

Q How were you treated, both as a black man and as a newcomer to farming?

A One of the great things about people in the South West is that if you show that you want to be part of the community they will go out of their way to help you.

Q Now you are using the 'Black Farmer' tag for the range of foods. It's not politically correct, is it? Is it right to play on your colour?

A It is politically correct – it's real. I was brought up in Birmingham in the inner city where you could walk miles to see a piece of grass and if you did it would be covered in litter. I want to demonstrate that anybody from anywhere can come and if you are prepared to be part of the community you can have a great time. Whether you are black or Asian if you are prepared to fit in you will be welcomed with open arms. I am saying that there are black people farming.

Q You reckon you're the only black farmer in the South West. Why are you the first? Will others follow?

A I'm only a first generation immigrant. Who knows? The thing with farming is that the land tends to be handed down to the sons through the generations so farms don't come up for sale often.

We were in Small Heath which at the time was one of the poorest areas in Europe. I faced the same problems anybody faced in that environment. People had problems with safety and security. I have changed now. I feel happier as a black person in a rural community than in an urban environment.

Q Why is that? I thought you would feel more conspicuous in a white area?

A In an urban area as a black man you can feel like an object. In a smaller community, people want to get to know you, what to find out about you.

Q One of your PR company's brands was Plymouth Gin. What work did you do for them?

A Commsplus specialises in food and drinks brands, especially in turning failing brands around. One of Plymouth Gin's problems was a lack of connection to the community. That is a precious resource. We needed to turn that around and we succeeded. There is now very strong local support for the brand.

Q So you have a PR company specialising in food brands and you have a farm. This is a case of marketing then, The Black Farmer brand.

A Of course I am marketing the brand but this is a real business. I worked for the BBC producing and directing food and drink programmes so the PR company was a progression. But my connection to food goes back further. I started off as a chef. I went to catering college and

worked as a chef in Birmingham. The recipes are mine and the foods are made by a company in the South West and have won Taste of the West [regional food] silver awards.

Q You won a couple of medals for sausages. What's the secret of a good banger?

A A lot of meat, which should taste and feel like meat, not something reconstituted. The added flavours should be traditional, such as leeks. They should not be messed about.

Q You have ambitions of becoming a Conservative MP. How far have you got?

A I am on the approved list of candidates. I am trying to find a seat. I would love to find a seat in the South West but to do that I have got to get past the blue rinse brigade.

Q What are the best and worst things about being a farmer?

A The best thing is the space and feeling you are part of nature. The worst thing is the supermarkets.

They are real hussies, the way they treat farmers.

I would love it if a certain percentage of their own brands had to be produced in the region.

We don't value farmers enough.

