

Sunday Mercury

He had never seen a cow until he was a

teen, now he just loves the countryside

BRITAIN'S ONLY BLACK FARMER IS A BRUMMIE

SPECIAL REPORT

BRITAIN'S only black farmer has told of his childhood in the mean backstreets of inner city Birmingham.

Wilfred Emmanuel-Jones was in his late teens before he even saw cows and horses in a field.

But he always had a dream to own his own farm. And now – against all the odds – he has achieved his goal.

Wilfred, now 47 and a wealthy and successful man, has launched a crusade to encourage black people to move from the cities into the countryside.

He scoffs at race relations chiefs who say there is rural apartheid against ethnic minority families.

"There may be suspicion of incomers in rural areas," said Wilfred. "But it has nothing to do with the colour of their skin."

"I have never had any problems. I am called 'The Black Farmer' by people who don't know my name."

"But that's an expression simply to differentiate me from other farmers. I don't mind being called that at all. It is not racist."

In fact, Wilfred has just launched a new range of gourmet sausages – called 'The Black Farmer'.

Wilfred's amazing rags-to-riches story started when he came to Britain from Jamaica with his parents and older sister, at the age of three. The family settled in Bankes Road, Small Heath, Birmingham.

Wilfred's parents went on to have seven more children – so there were eventually 11 people living in a tiny terraced house.

His parents came from a rural part of Jamaica, three hours from the capital, Kingston.

Wilfred's father, Webster, who worked in a factory after settling in Birmingham, died 20 years ago. His mother, Susan, now lives in Ladywood, Birmingham.

Wilfred left the former Oldknow Secondary Modern School in Small Heath with no qualifications, partly because he is dyslexic.

After a failed career in the Army, he went into catering and worked as a chef at restaurants and hotels in Birmingham, including the Plough & Harrow in Hagley Road, Edgbaston, and Michelle's in Harborne.

Then he moved into TV, getting his first break at BBC Pebble Mill in Edgbaston.



HOME: Bankes Road, Small Heath

He worked for 15 years as a producer and director on food and drink shows, bringing the likes of Gordon Ramsay, Antony Worrall-Thompson and Brian Turner to the small screen.

Ten years ago, Wilfred, who is married and has three children, started a food and drinks marketing agency in London – and it became highly successful.

But seven years ago, he bought run-down West Kitcham Farm at St Giles on the Heath near Launceston, Cornwall.

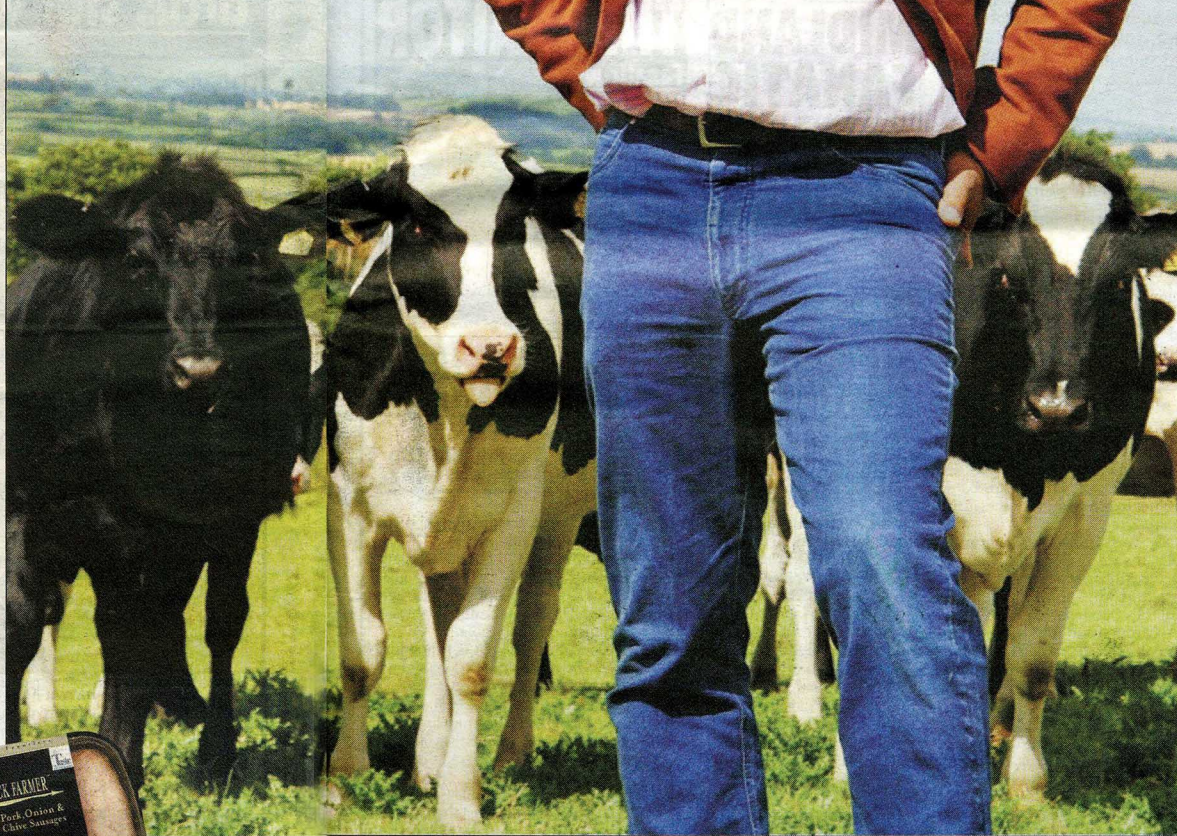
The farm had been in the same family for generations but was put up for sale at a time when farmers were leaving the land because they were unable to make a living.

Wilfred has spent six years restoring the farm and out-buildings to their former glory. On the 50 acres, he rears beef cattle, sheep and pigs.

"When I was a little boy in Small Heath, I used to help my father on his allotment and I always dreamed of owning my own farm," said Wilfred. "Now I have one. I divide my time between my home in London and the farm in the West Country. I love the farm."

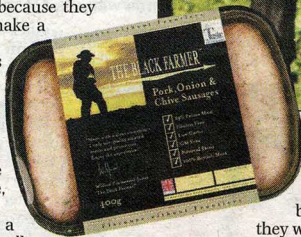
"But times are still difficult in farming and I couldn't make a living out of the farm unless I had the other business interests."

Wilfred revealed his town and country lifestyle after claims last week that families from ethnic



Race watchdogs say that apartheid is ripe in rural communities, and that ethnic minorities are unwelcome. **BOB HAYWOOD** meets the Birmingham man who is Britain's only black farmer.

DOWN ON THE FARM: Wilfred Emmanuel-Jones with his cows and (below) his gourmet sausages, called 'The Black Farmer'



minorities were afraid to settle in the countryside because of how they would be treated.

Trevor Phillips, chairman of the Commission for Racial Equality, has blamed a form of 'passive apartheid' for keeping black and Asian people out of rural communities.

Many regarded them as 'no-go' areas, he said.

Mr Phillips said this resulted in segregation between city-dwelling ethnic minorities and the overwhelmingly white rural population.

"You go into a shop and people look at you as if to say: 'Where do you come from, Planet Zarg?' he said.

"The question asked of me is: 'What

are you doing here?' and 'We don't get many like you round here.'"

But Wilfred countered: "Trevor Phillips completely fails to appreciate the outlook of country people."

"They are not racist but they are acutely aware of their safety, security and vulnerability."

"A stranger, of whatever colour, represents a potential threat. My farm is half-a-mile from my nearest neighbour and if someone walks up my lane, I need to be aware and inquisitive."

"This obviously wouldn't happen in a city where people are walking past other people's front doors all the time."

"I don't feel like an outsider in the countryside. I have been welcomed

in the West Country and I have brought much-needed employment to this immediate area."

"I realise not all black people can buy a farm, like me, but there are employment prospects in rural areas which black people would do well to consider, especially if they are unemployed."

Although he lives in London and the West Country, Wilfred is now forging new ties with Birmingham.

His elder son, Peter, 17, has just started at Birmingham College of Food, Tourism and Creative Studies with the aim of becoming a chef, like his father in his younger years.

But Wilfred also has high political ambitions.

He is a staunch Conservative and

describes himself as a model of 'the Tory dream' – an immigrant to Britain who made good.

Wilfred has just been accepted on to the list of prospective Parliamentary candidates to fight the next general election in a Birmingham seat.

His preference would be Sparkhill and Small Heath, where he grew up – or Ladywood, where his mother lives.

Both are Labour strongholds, held by MPs Roger Godsiff and Clare Short respectively, and a Tory win would be a major political shock. But don't rule out a surprise.

Wilfred Emmanuel-Jones is used to challenges in life.

SundayMercury@mrn.co.uk