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OF FASHION




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THE VOICE INTERVIEW BY DANIELLE WEEKES

A farm believer

The owner of Black Farmer brand tells his story

"I want to be the party chairman of the Conservative Party," Wilfred Emmanuel-Jones, Britain's only black farmer declares, with not even a hint of modesty.

Before I can reply, he races on to explain how he would broaden the appeal of the Conservatives, who have just lost a general election.

"Forget the posh, blue-rinse brigade – we already have them in our pockets," he continues, dismissively.

"I'd woo Mrs Jones the care worker from Leeds who has a builder husband and who works hard to balance the books. Once we have her on our side we will be the ruling party."

He's scathing about the big business in sympathy built up by the socialists.

"They have been saying that they understand the plight of ethnic minorities for over five years. But the standard of judgment should be what a party has done for individuals and for members of their party. Look at Paul Boateng who's going to be lord of the Manor in Africa and Diane Abbott has been pushed aside and only has a say on the couch beside Michael Portillo," he says.

Welcome to the gospel according to the outspoken Wilfred Emmanuel-Jones, a man of little political experience who was offered a constituency in his childhood town of Birmingham but turned it down because: "I knew we were going to lose and I hated what [Michael] Howard was doing on immigration".

I had a hard time getting a word in edgeways, so I let him railroad on: "A lot of the black members of the Conservative Party are like white guys in drag".

Did he just say that?
"They believe that you have to be white to fit. But as an outsider you can also effect change," he says.

To an urban dweller, 47-year-old Jones, who owns a farm in the frontier territory between Devon and Cornwall, is nothing if not an outsider.

Certainly, when he fell in love with the dilapidated West Kitcham farm during a family holiday seven years ago, many of his neighbours had not seen a black person since the Second World War.

But seduced by the isolation, the married father-of-three put in an immediate offer and moved up to Devon from London to oversee renovations. It took him six months and £350,000 – "a bloody fortune" – to get his new purchase up to scratch.

Lifton, the nearest village, is about a three-mile walk, as is the pub and the nearest corner shop. To find a fellow Jamaican, he'd have to travel much further.

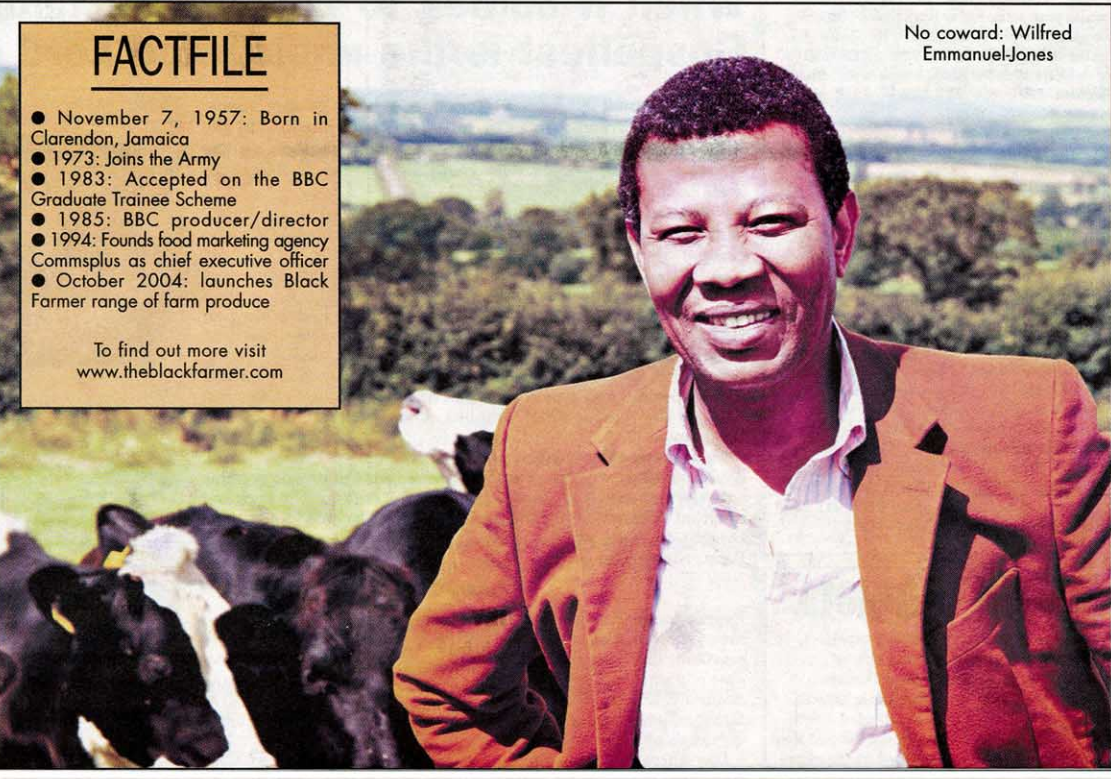
"As soon as I moved in I realised that there weren't any black people for miles, but it didn't worry me. Anyway, I'm making progress. At first my neighbours called me coloured. Now I'm 'the black farmer,'" he says.

Not one to be easily offended, Jones turned the well meant but slightly un-PC phrase into a marketing success and has used the nickname on the line of sauces, sausages and hams that he began to produce commercially in October last year. A canny business decision, as Jones' farm is now projected to record a £2m

FACTFILE

- November 7, 1957: Born in Clarendon, Jamaica
- 1973: Joins the Army
- 1983: Accepted on the BBC Graduate Trainee Scheme
- 1985: BBC producer/director
- 1994: Founds food marketing agency Commsplus as chief executive officer
- October 2004: launches Black Farmer range of farm produce

To find out more visit www.theblackfarmer.com



No coward: Wilfred Emmanuel-Jones

turnover in six months' time. He now owns 100 Red Devon cattle and 200 pigs. Black Farmer products can be found in Tesco's and Sainsbury's in the Home Counties and Jones just made his first shipment to an up-market super-deli in the heart of trendy Greenwich Village in New York.

But he believes that his farm would have failed without the help of his neighbours who adopted him and taught him everything he knows. Seven years on, he trusts them to buy his livestock.

Jones is so determined to 'colour in' the countryside that he is recruiting eight ethnic minority youths between 16 and 20 to learn the ropes at his farm for six weeks, beginning mid-June. His pet project took form when the Commission for Racial Equality chief Trevor Phillips claimed earlier this year that a system of passive apartheid was operating in rural Britain.

"Over the last year there has been a massive debate about blacks and Asians being afraid to travel to the countryside because of perceived racism. Most ethnic minorities don't know what it's like to live and work in a rural area.

"In many ways the experiences of ethnic minorities and villagers are very similar: they are disenfranchised and not top of the political agenda. It's just a case of introducing the two different worlds to each other."

And if the piles of application forms are anything to go by, there are hundreds of young blacks and Asians trapped in city high rises, yearning for open spaces and endless greenery. During the six weeks,

the students will buy their own animals and sell produce at the county market, which is the hub of village existence.

They'll learn to drive tractors, to drain a field, to fish, to shoot, and controversially, how to train fox hounds.

Wilfred Emmanuel-Jones was born in Clarendon in Jamaica and moved to Britain to join his parents in the 1950s when he was only four. They were a big family – Wilfred has eight brothers and sisters – but they settled in a two-up, two-down in Small Heath, Birmingham – one of the poorest areas in Western Europe at the time.

He left school at 16 with no qualifica-

"Black members of the Conservative Party are like white guys in drag"

tions and joined the army for a year, followed by catering college. He thrived under the pressure of the job and stuck with it for six years before setting his mind on working for the BBC.

"Everyone thought that I was crazy, because I had no qualifications and the Beeb only hired Oxbridge types," he says.

He wrote letters and made phone calls and then wrote letters again. Anyone who worked for the BBC became his new best friend.

Persistence paid off when finally he landed a job as a researcher and was later accepted on the BBC's graduate trainee

scheme that set him off on a 15-year career with the BBC.

"I was a bit of a rogue. My mentor Peter Bazalgette (the brains behind Ready Steady Cook and Big Brother), used to prevent people from sacking me because he saw the potential in me. I was a street boy from Small Heath and I said things that pissed off the people in power."

After travelling the world to make food documentaries, he left the BBC and formed a food marketing agency, based in Battersea, which is best known for launching the Kettle chips brand.

He attributes his success to a childhood promise made to his father who spent most of his years working in a factory.

"Dad's mantra was that none of his children would ever work in a factory; he made us promise that we would do better than that. I have the gift of being an immigrant. I believe that it instills you with a natural drive to better yourself."

A good day for him is sitting on a bench at the end of his field, watching the sunset with only a glass of vodka and lime for company.

He pauses to say: "Trevor Phillips has probably forgotten this, but I applied for job as a researcher on Black on Black, a series that he did in the eighties, but he turned me down. Don't get me wrong, I don't want to stir up a rivalry with Trevor, but I'll never forget that."

I'm assuming that roughly translated, this means 'don't give up'. He replies in his own uniquely unapologetic way. "To make an impression you can't pussyfoot around, you have to be bold."