

Your Royal Highness, My Lords, Ladies & Gentlemen

I am here this morning to give testimony to the work of R.A.B.I. and a brief insight into what their support has given me and my family.

My name is John Wyatt. I am 38 years old, my wife is Julia and we have twin children, Angus and Imogen.

At present I am a tenant farmer on 100 acres just outside of Wolverhampton. If I describe my farming career, it would sound like a complete accident, beset with challenges and market forces which have hampered our overall success.

I am from a farming family but all on my mother's side with no direct link to a farm. The only way we were going to farm in our own right was to take on a tenancy.

We started farming in June 1999 on a dairy holding, thinking that with the milk price at 17p per litre, we were getting into an industry which was at the bottom of a trough and the milk price and cow price was only going to go up, giving us the perfect start.

This was not the case. Within four years the milk price had slipped to around 13 pence per litre and we had also suffered 18 months of hell going through the foot and mouth outbreak of 2001. It was soon apparent that milking cows was unsustainable and every time we turned the milking machine on it was costing us money. In 2004 we sold the cows and bought 100 milking goats - an industry that was in its fledgling years but was expanding. We expanded with it, milking 400 goats in 2008.

But we were always the smallest herd in the group, with others milking between 1,500 and 2,000 goats. During that year, our milk buyer advised us that our contract was in jeopardy as we were not viable to pick up. We were looking at having to borrow a great deal of money in order to expand in such a way as to remain viable - this was something that I was not prepared to do to myself or my family. We were potentially looking into a financial abyss due to the economic crisis. Goats produce and the goats themselves crashed in value. With having 400 goats to feed with no market to sell into and no money to even attempt to process ourselves, my wife made contact with R.A.B.I. to see if there were funds or help we could get to aid our situation.

It was suggested to us that we could qualify for the Gateway Project and in the summer of 2008 I completed my HGV licence - at a cost of £3,600 paid for by RABI. But with the economic downturn, driving jobs were few and far between with well over 18 applications for each position.

And being a new driver there was no way I was going to get a look in. After two months of scouring the newspapers and internet, there it was - an advert for a Class 1 livestock driver - just up the road from me at Penkridge.

After a phonecall, I was taken on, not for my driving experience, but because I could handle livestock. A fantastic break and one which I've never looked back on. I have been moving livestock for 14 months now, the goats have been sold at a loss but with extra income coming from the driving, I am nearly debt free.

We are farming the farm now on a part time basis, rearing beef and sheep. I would like to take this opportunity to thank Julia for putting up with me leaving the house at 3 in the morning and not getting back till late: Rob, my boss for taking a chance on a new driver: and most of all RABI for financing my HGV licence to allow me to look at my financial and farming career in a much brighter light.