

# Down on the farm!

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Interview with **JB Gill**

Star of BAFTA nominated CBeebies series 'Down on the Farm' and owner of a 10 acre smallholding in the Kent countryside, Jonathan Benjamin 'JB' Gill farms 200 Kellybronze turkeys, Tamworth pigs and a handful of chickens.

Alongside his wife Chloe and 2 year old son Ace, JB says he is the happiest he has ever been living the country life. We caught up with the former JLS singer at one of the busiest times of his year, where, amongst the Christmas poultry preparations, he is penning new material for a children's book series, filming and working on extending the farm.

**JB, Thanks so much for talking with me. I guess the obvious first question is, why farming?**

You're very welcome! It was something that happened totally organically, excuse the pun. There was no plan to go into farming but I have always been someone who believes that resourcefulness is important and I happened to become the owner of 10 acres of glorious Kentish countryside when I left my family home at 24 years old. I knew that the land had been farmed historically and it gave me the idea to explore different farming types to reintroduce to the land and everything grew from there.

**Has your celebrity status helped you get things off the ground?**

It was a platform I could never have dreamed to have and it's made my venture into the relatively unknown so much easier. People like Adam Henson and Jimmy Doherty have given some excellent farming gems of wisdom!

**Do people see you as JB the singer or JB the farmer?**

Both! It's funny because depending on the age, you can almost predict which type of person you'll meet. That said, because the farm story is so unique, most people will either ask about a TV show they've seen me on and then ask how the farm is going, or they'll congratulate me on what I'm doing with the farm, then ask if I am still doing any music. It's a great ice breaker.

**What are you doing in July?**

This is one of the busiest times of the year for us, as we receive our Turkey poults in July. We spend about a week moving their shelter, preparing and setting up the electric



Smitten: JB says he is in love with the Countryside

fencing, installing their irrigation system and making sure when they arrive on site they have everything they need! Christmas begins in July for us!

**The Kelly Bronze has quite a reputation, what drew you to the breed?**

I knew absolutely nothing about Turkey farming before Paul [Kelly, Kelly's Turkeys] approached me. In fact, I had only ever eaten Turkey once or twice in my life and certainly never for Christmas! I sampled their produce and was hooked instantly. I think the breed is brilliant and the taste is second to none, it's certainly the centrepiece of our Christmas dinners now.

**Where do you sell your finished produce?**

Everything I produce, I sell directly to the local community from the farm.

**What is your biggest achievement?**

Our biggest achievement was rearing 170 Turkeys without a single fatality. Needless to say, we sold out our stock that year and achieved double our previous year's sales!

**What has been the most difficult part of this journey?**

Work life balance! Learning how to stick to my strengths and not just run off and try to do what everyone else is doing. I have come to realise that you cannot buy time and there is a reason why farming is one of the world's oldest industries.

**What's the best thing about farming?**

It's being able to share the experience with my family. My son, Ace, is able to grow up in an incredible environment, I'm able to rescue animals that might otherwise be put to slaughter and give them a fulfilling life again and, I'm also able to contribute to my local community with food that has been lovingly reared. It's a joy to see my family's faces when we have a roast loin of pork for dinner, or a full English farm breakfast!

**He is ridiculously cute. Is Ace loving the country life?**

Ha-ha, Ace literally lives outside! He spends all his time wanting to go on the farm and when he's out there with me, he has his most prolific protests because he doesn't want to go back home! It's a bit early to call but I think he is a shoe-in as a successor! On a serious note, I've been blown away by how much the country lifestyle has helped Chloe and I to raise him and he really has gained a sense of purpose and understanding of the relationship between humans and nature because of it. We are well and truly blessed.

**Would you like him to follow in your footsteps?**

Judging by his character at the moment, I can't really see him being happy doing anything which doesn't involve him being physical or outside! We'll have to wait and see what he wants to do, but for now, I'm thoroughly enjoying showing him the ropes.

**You're currently working on some farm children's books, can you tell me more about those?**

I can't go in to too much detail at this stage but since working with children on 'Down On The Farm', developing a book series has been one of my top priorities. I think books are still an excellent tool for learning and it's one way I can be creative with my farming. Who says it all has to take place in a field?!

Family Farming: JB, wife Chloe and son Ace at the smallholding near Orpington



**You're a fantastic ambassador for the industry already, how important is it for you to educate inner city children about food and farming?**

I believe it's extremely important to bring the farm to those who are arguably unable to experience it themselves. Inner city children simply must know about how their food gets to their plates. However, the whole journey our food takes is increasingly becoming lost on all generations within the UK. We shy away from hard topics such as culling and processing? We must see more education amongst both children and adults if we are wanting to evidence major changes in our attitude towards food and farming.

**Have you got any other projects on the horizon?**

We are just in the process of expanding the farm at the moment, so that is taking up most of my time. I'm also creating a couple of TV shows, which I hope to have commissioned within the next year so watch this space.

**Where do you find is the best place to go for advice and support?**

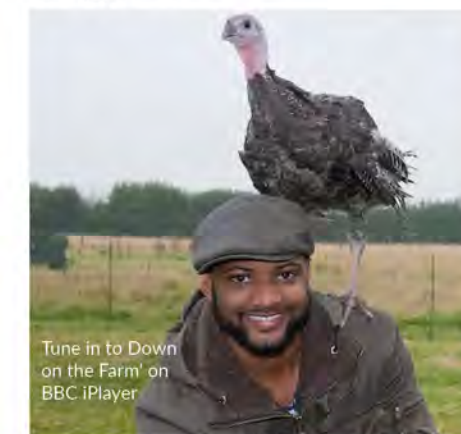
Other than my wife, the NFU are a brilliant base for support in rural and agricultural affairs. I'm lucky in the sense that I also have access to a number of experienced and knowledgeable farmers and entrepreneurs who are all so generous with their time, expertise and wisdom.

**Lastly, what single piece of advice can you give to anyone looking to make the move in Agriculture who doesn't come from that background?**

Someone has to do it, why can't it be you? The biggest myth in farming is that you have to own the land in order to farm it! There are so many farmers operating farms with generational tenancies and the opportunities in a growing, yet underpopulated industry are endless! In a time of so much political uncertainty, if we want to sustain the current volume of home-grown food production in the UK, we cannot afford to place restrictions on anyone considering a career in Ag.

**Thank you for your time JB.**

It's my pleasure



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