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**ESL Podcast 1036 – Farming and Agribusiness**

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**GLOSSARY**

**dying industry** – a sector (part) of the economy that is becoming smaller and may no longer exist in the future

\* If people continue to buy foreign cars, automobile manufacturing could become a dying industry in the United States.

**family farm** – a farm that is owned and operated by a family, not a corporation

\* They dream of buying some land and having a family farm with cows, pigs, chickens, and fields of corn and blueberries.

**small-scale** – small, not large; for a small number of people

\* Right now, we're limited to small-scale production out of our basement, but if sales continue to increase, we'll be able to move into a small factory.

**agribusiness** – the sector (part) of the economy that includes very large corporations that own and operate large farms on very large areas of land

\* A lot of people are concerned about how animals are treated in agribusiness.

**alive and well** – thriving; doing very well; with a lot of success

\* Despite the government's best efforts, people still cheat on their taxes and not pay what they owe.

**government subsidy** – money paid by the government to a manufacturer to cause the price of a product to be lower

\* Government subsidies of sugar and corn have made soda, chips, cookies, and other types of junk food very inexpensive.

**lucrative** – profitable; making a lot of money

\* A great invention can be very lucrative, but only if you have the patent.

**livelihood** – how one makes a living; how one earns money; a job or career

\* As a butcher in a small town, Sayeed's livelihood has always been dependent on good customer service.

**to edge out** – to do better than someone or something else so that its power or influence weakens while one's own power and influence increases

\* Renee hopes to edge out the other dancers in the salsa competition.



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**output** – production; the amount of a product or service made by someone with a certain amount of resources and/or in a certain amount of time; a measure of efficiency

\* If we hire more workers, we can increase output by up to 40%.

**the name of the game** – the most important thing in deciding how things are done; the way things are expected to be

\* Being involved in a lot of extracurricular activities is the name of the game for high school students who want to be admitted to prestigious colleges.

**to throw in the towel** – to give up; to stop trying to do something, especially because it seems too difficult or impossible

\* We need to hire someone who is very persistent and won't throw in the towel the first time there's an obstacle.

**that's a shame** – a phrase used to express disappointment or sadness about something that is happening, especially something that seems unfair

\* Adam's father was ill and couldn't attend his son's college graduation. That's a shame!

**domestic** – within a country; not international

\* Will we ever have enough domestic oil production to avoid importing oil?

**a way of life** – the way things are done, especially referring to culture; how people live in a certain area or with certain opinions

\* Fishing is a way of life for many people who live in coastal towns.

**to come from a long line of** – to have many family members involved in a particular industry or hobby

\* Vince comes from a long line of military officers.

**very** – exact; precise; a word used to emphasize the following word

\* Your shopping cart is full of the very junk foods that the doctor told you to stop eating!

**twist of fate** – an unanticipated change in events, especially an ironic one

\* In a twist of fate, Dynee finally got a job on the day that she was evicted from her apartment because she could not afford to pay the rent.



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### COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS

1. What does it mean for something to be lucrative?
  - a) It is profitable.
  - b) It is legal.
  - c) It is fair.
  
2. What does Brad mean when he says, “We’re losing a way of life”?
  - a) People aren’t able to do what they used to do.
  - b) People are dying at younger ages.
  - c) People are moving out of the area.

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### WHAT ELSE DOES IT MEAN?

#### **to edge out**

The phrase “to edge out,” in this podcast, means to outcompete, or to do better than someone or something else so that its power or influence weakens while one’s own power and influence increases: “Through product innovation and effective marketing, we’re edging out our competitors.” The phrase “to edge up/down” means to increase or decrease slightly: “Sales are edging up, but not as quickly as we’d hoped.” The verb “to edge” can mean to move slowly, with many small movements: “The students edged closer to the blackboard as they tried to understand the calculation.” Finally, when talking about lawn care, “to edge” means to cut the borders of a grassy area, especially next to pavement, so that it appears neat and orderly: “Did you edge the grass by hand, or did you use a machine?”

#### **very**

In this podcast, the word “very” is used to emphasize the word that follows it: “Aren’t those the very clothes that you were wearing yesterday?” Or, “The very moment he saw Evelyn, he knew he wanted to marry her.” The phrase “one’s very own” emphasizes that something belongs to oneself and to no one else: “Karina was only 23 years old when she bought her very own home.” The phrase “the very thought of (something)” or “the very idea of (something)” means just suggesting something: “The very idea of losing my job makes me feel sick.” Finally, the formal phrase “very well” indicates that one agrees to do something: “Very well, I’ll help you move on Friday, but you have to return the favor when I move next year.”



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**CULTURE NOTE**

**Types of Subsidies**

Businesses can receive many types of subsidies, but they can be divided into two “categories” (groups): “direct subsidies” and “indirect subsidies.”

“Direct subsidies” include “cash grants” and “interest-free loan.” A “cash” (money) “grant” (money given or awarded to someone for a purpose) is a “direct” (without the involvement of another person or organization) payment to the “recipient” (the person or organization that receives something). An “interest-free loan,” like any other “loan” (money that is given to someone with the expectation that it will be paid back), involves a cash payment, but the recipient must pay it back. However, the recipient does not have to pay “interest” (a percentage of the original amount) as he or she would if receiving a loan from a bank.

“Indirect subsidies” do not involve the payment of cash to a recipient, but they still “benefit” (bring advantages to; help) the “beneficiary” (the person who receives the benefits of something). “Tax breaks,” or opportunities to save money on taxes, paying less than usual, are an example of indirect subsidies. For example, if a community wants to “attract” (bring in) a large manufacturer in order to create jobs, it might offer a tax break so that the company does not have to pay taxes for the land where the factory is built. Another example of an indirect subsidy is a “rent rebate,” where the government “reimburses” (pays back) the company or a “portion” (part) or all of its “rent payments” (money paid to use land or a building).

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Comprehension Questions Correct Answers: 1 – a; 2 – a



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**COMPLETE TRANSCRIPT**

Welcome to English as a Second Language Podcast number 1,036 – Farming and Agribusiness.

This is English as a Second Language Podcast episode 1,036. I'm your host, Dr. Jeff McQuillan, coming to you from the Center for Educational Development in beautiful Los Angeles, California.

Visit our website at [ESLPod.com](http://ESLPod.com). Go there and become a member of ESL Podcast, and download the 10-page Learning Guide for this episode.

This episode is a dialogue between Brad and Irene about farming – growing food. Let's get started.

[start of dialogue]

Brad: Is this your first visit to this area?

Irene: It is, and I'm surprised to see so many farms. I thought farming was a dying industry.

Brad: Family farms and small-scale farming are disappearing, but agribusiness is alive and well, thanks to government subsidies.

Irene: Are they lucrative?

Brad: They can be, but the subsidies were originally given to protect the livelihood of farmers.

Irene: And that's not what's happening?

Brad: Well, agribusiness has edged out small-scale farms because output is the name of the game. A lot of small-scale farmers have thrown in the towel.

Irene: That's a shame, but the subsidies are still used to protect domestic food production, right?

Brad: That may be, but we're losing a way of life. I come from a long line of farmers.

Irene: And you're not farming?



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Brad: Nope.

Irene: What do you do?

Brad: I work for the government agency that gives out subsidies to the very farms that put us out of business.

Irene: That's quite a twist of fate.

Brad: You said it.

[end of dialogue]

Our dialogue begins with Brad asking Irene, "Is this your first visit to this area?" Is this the first time you have been here? Irene says, "It is, and I'm surprised to see so many farms. I thought farming was a dying industry." A "farm" is a large area of land where food is grown and animals are also kept, animals that are used eventually for food.

Irene thought that "farming was a dying industry." An "industry" (industry) is a business, or more properly a kind of business – a part of the economy that includes similar kinds of businesses. So, we could have the "movie industry." That would include all of the companies here in Los Angeles and other places that make movies.

Irene thought that farming was "a dying industry." "Dying" comes from the verb "to die." "To die" means to stop living, to no longer be living. "Dying" implies that something is still alive, but it's going to be dead very soon. The idea here is that not that many people are going into farming and that the business of farming won't be around for a long time, at least in the area that Brad and Irene are talking about.

Brad says, however, "Family farms and small-scale farming are disappearing, but agribusiness is alive and well, thanks to government subsidies." A "family farm" would be a farm owned by – that's correct – a single family. Back in the nineteenth and early twentieth century, most farms were probably owned by individual families that grew food for themselves and, of course, to sell to other people.

However, during the 1970s and 80s, many of these family farms disappeared – that is, they were no longer able to be profitable, and so the families either sold



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the farm to a large business or to someone who wanted to do something else with the land. “Agribusiness” (agribusiness) is formed from two different words, “agriculture” and “business.” “Agriculture” is another word to describe the growing of food. “Agribusiness” is a word we use to describe large companies that own farms.

Brad says that “agribusiness is alive and well.” That expression “to be alive and well” is quite common in English. It means to be doing very well, to have a lot of success. The agribusinesses are successful, according to Brad, “thanks to” – or because of – “government subsidies.” A “subsidy” (subsidy) is when someone gives you money to do something. In the United States, as in many countries, the government tries to protect farms and to protect the agricultural business by giving businesses and farmers money – money to grow certain kinds of food.

Now, the economic reasoning for this activity is somewhat questionable, according to some economists. Many economists say it doesn’t make sense for the government to pay people in farming when they don’t pay people in other businesses in order to survive. Of course, there are arguments on the other side – that is, there are people who think it does do some good.

Irene says, “Are they lucrative?” “They” here refers to the businesses involved in agriculture. The word “lucrative” (lucrative) means profitable. It means making a lot of money. If your business is lucrative, you are making a lot of money, you are getting rich. Brad says, “They can be,” meaning these businesses can be lucrative, “but the subsidies were originally given to protect the livelihood of farmers.”

Brad explains why the government started giving subsidies to farmers many years ago. The reason, and the reason that many governments give, for the subsidies is “to protect the livelihood of farmers.” “Livelihood” (livelihood) refers to one’s job or career – how you make a living, how you make money. My livelihood is working for the Center for Educational Development doing these podcasts. Other people’s livelihoods depend on different jobs that they have.

The “livelihood of farmers,” then, refers to the economic wellbeing of farmers, the jobs of farmers. When most farms were owned by families, the government felt it was important to protect these families to make sure that they didn’t, if you will, “go out of business.” Irene says, “And that’s not what’s happening?” She’s questioning Brad, asking him if that is not still the purpose of these government subsidies.



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Brad says, “Well, agribusiness has edged out small-scale farms because output is the name of the game.” The phrasal verb “to edge (edge) – out” means to do better than someone or something else so that you become more powerful and the other person or thing becomes less powerful, less influential, less successful. Brad is saying that agribusiness “has edged out small-scale” – small – “farms.” It has become more successful. Why? Brad explains that “output is the name of the game.” “Output” is what you produce, what you make.

Agribusinesses are large companies that produce a lot of food, and that makes them more successful. The phrase “the name of the game” means the most important thing in deciding how the way things are done. The name of the game in college is getting good grades and saying nice things to your professor, which gives you good grades. Well, that’s not exactly true. Just because you say something nice to your professor doesn’t mean he or she will give you a good grade, but in my own experience, it doesn’t hurt – meaning it will never harm you.

The name of the game here in agribusiness is “output” – is producing a lot of food. Brad says, “A lot of small-scale farmers have thrown in the towel.” The expression “to throw in the towel” (towel) means to give up, to stop trying, especially when something seems too difficult. Irene responds, “That’s a shame.” The expression “that’s a shame” (shame) is used to express sadness about something that is happening, especially something that seems unfair, unjust.

Irene says “The subsidies are still used to protect domestic food production, right?” “Domestic” (domestic) here means within the country. The opposite of domestic would be “international.” This is another reason why governments give subsidies to farmers. It’s to protect the production of food within the country, so that in case there is a war or other problems, they don’t have to rely on or depend on other countries in order to get their food. At least, that’s one of the official reasons given. I think it probably is more political than that, but we won’t get into that here.

Brad says, “That may be,” meaning yes, it’s possible that these subsidies are used to protect domestic food production. “But,” he says, “we’re losing a way of life.” A “way of life” is a way of living, the way things are done, the culture of that particular area. Brad says, “I come from a long line of farmers.” If you say “I come from a long line” of something, you mean that you have many family members involved in a particular business or industry or area. There is also the implication here that this has been going on for many years, perhaps many generations.

For example, I come from a long line of plumbers – people who fix toilets and sinks. My grandfather was a plumber. My uncles were plumbers. My father was



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not a plumber – he was a teacher – but the McQuillans are known in the place where I grew up, St. Paul, Minnesota, as plumbers, and still today my cousins own McQuillan Brothers Plumbing. So, I come from a long line of plumbers. I can also say I come from a long line of teachers, because my father is a teacher, my sister and two of my brothers were teachers, I have nieces who are teachers. But we're talking not about me, but about Brad.

Brad is asked by Irene, "And you're not farming?" Brad says, "Nope." "Nope" is an informal way of saying no. Irene says, "What do you do?" Brad says, "I work for the government agency," the part of the government, "that gives out subsidies to the very farms that put us out of business." Brad says that he works for the government agency, the part of the government, that actually gives the money, the subsidies, to these large agribusinesses. He uses the term "the very farms that put us out of business."

The use of the word "very" here means these precise, or exact, things. It's a word used to emphasize the next word, the following word. Usually this construction, this word, is used when you are pointing out something that is ironic, something that seems contradictory. For example, you could say "The very parents who complain about the schools not doing their job are the ones that never help their children with their homework." That's not true, but that would be an example of using this word "very" to specify a group who seems to be acting in some contradictory manner.

Irene says, "That's quite a twist of fate." A "twist (twist) of fate (fate)" is an unexpected change in events, especially one that is ironic. So in this case, Brad used to work on a family farm, and now he works for the government agency that gives money to the agribusinesses that in some ways put the family farms out of business. So, it's "ironic" (ironic). It's the opposite of what you would expect.

Brad ends the dialogue by saying, "You said it." That expression "you said it" is often used when you want to agree with what the other person has said and emphasize how correct the other person is. I'd say we use this expression when the other person is saying something negative. For example, it's really cold in here. You might say, "You said it." It is cold in here. You are agreeing with the other person and emphasizing how correct you think the other person is.

Now let's listen to the dialogue, this time at a normal speed.

[start of dialogue]

Brad: Is this your first visit to this area?



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[end of dialogue]

Here at ESL Podcast, we're glad that our scriptwriter hasn't thrown in the towel yet. That's because we love our wonderful scripts written by Dr. Lucy Tse.



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From Los Angeles, California, I'm Jeff McQuillan. Thank you for listening. Come back and listen to us again right here on ESL Podcast.

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