

New Entrants to Farming Programme



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Case Study

Robert Taylor & Christine Croal



'We love farming, we love our livestock'

A short biog ...

Robert was brought up in the farming industry, with his Father employed as a farm worker. Robert knew he always wanted to farm despite there being no family farming business, for him to go home to. Upon leaving school, Robert went to work on a Nairnshire farm gaining valuable work experience before starting a two year course at SAC Craibstone College, which he left after attaining a Diploma in Agriculture.

After leaving college he worked as a general farmworker and tractor man on a number of mixed cattle and sheep farms in Nairnshire and Aberdeenshire. Spending the past five years employed as stockman for a well-known pedigree Simmental herd in Morayshire. Robert had been looking for suitable farms and land for sale for quite a while even travelling as far as Caithness to look at a potential farm. With the attitude of *'If I don't do it now, then probably never will'* he intensified his search for farming properties in the hope of finding a suitable farm and perusing his ambition to have his own place. After being unsuccessful and narrowly outbid

for a 100 acre farm in the Keith area, Robert's partner Christine (a sheep farmer's daughter from Blairgowrie) found Upper Woodside farm for sale through Aberdeen & Northern Estates (part of the ANM Group), and the couple set about trying to secure funding to make the purchase. An offer was placed and accepted in March 2018 with the couple moving into the farm in July 2018. Christine's flock of 50 pedigree Suffolk sheep and 50 mule hogs relocated with them.

Upper Woodside near Rothiemay extends to 56 acres of grassland. The farm has a range of buildings including a cattle court and general purpose/storage shed as well as traditional farmhouse. Along with buying the farm Robert and Christine also bought the machinery, implements and all other farm equipment from the previous owner Roy who was keen for New Entrants to buy his farm and get a start in the industry.

The machinery and implements allowed them to make hay in their first year which also provided valuable income as some was sold to a neighbour. The same neighbour helps the couple when they need it.

The money from the sale of the hay also helped the pair to rent winter grazing, which they hope to be able to keep as a seasonal let.

The couple increased their flock, buying a 100 mixed ewes with lambs at foot last year, their intention being to build up a breeding flock. The lambs were sold at the end of last year which generated much needed income after purchasing the farm. They now currently have a flock of approx. 200 ewes (a proportion of which are MV Accredited).

Robert continues to work on a mixed beef and sheep farm not far from Upper Woodside to supplement their income.

What has been your biggest challenge as a new entrant?

Finding a suitable farm was the first difficulty. Although they could find pockets of land for sale there was no buildings or house along with these.

'It was hard to find what we were looking for, as a lot of the properties we looked at required a lot of work either with fencing or buildings or the house not being liveable. The farms which were well fenced with a good house etc. we felt weren't large enough with only a small acreage'

Another challenge has been simply getting to grips with everything, finding what works and doesn't work and generally getting know their farm.

What is your main motivation?

"I have always wanted my own farm. I have saved money with the aim of owning my own farm one day. We love what we do and wouldn't want to do anything else"



What hurdles have you had to overcome?

Paying for everything was definitely a hurdle. We found out very quickly that being a new business meant that we had to pay for feed, fuel, ear tags etc. upfront which was difficult when you've a lot of bills to pay. We had to pay out a lot in our first year'.

The couple missed out on the possibility of New Entrant Grant funding as the application round had closed before they were in the position to apply. This meant that they had to use their own cash and savings for improvements including fencing which was extremely hard after initially purchasing the farm and having the operating expenses e.g. feed, fuel, etc.

Another hurdle was, the previous owner had kept cattle and the buildings and facilities were all suited to this, the couple had to adapt this to make them suitable for sheep.



What advisory and financial assistance have you received?

Robert has attended the Morayshire group of FAS new entrants to farming programme meetings. These gave him a good insight to what options were available to New Entrants, as well as being a good place to talk with likeminded folk in a similar circumstance.

They turned to friends who were new entrants themselves and family for advice which was a great support.

The couple came up with a business plan ourselves and after a couple of attempts secured mortgage funding through the Bank of Scotland whose Inverurie branch couldn't have been more helpful.

The basic payment for the farm was included as part of the sale and has given valuable income to help with starting the business. They have since used a local constancy firm to help with queries associated with registering the business and transferring entitlements.

Roy, the previous owner has been a great help and continues to help and support the couple. He is always just a phone call away for any queries they have about anything relating to the farm. His insight is much appreciated and has helped them a lot.

What advice would you give to someone thinking of entering the industry?

'Save hard and try to keep to a budget when buying so that you have money left over for unexpected bills'.

'Don't be scared to put the work in, as its going to be hard work ,but it'll be worth it'.

New Entrants to Farming "get with the" Programme

There is a network of new entrants across the country at various stages of developing their businesses. You can join in:

- www.facebook.com/NewEntrants
- www.fas.scot/new-entrants/
- Regional workshops

For more info contact Kirsten Williams, Consultant, SAC Consulting, Clifton Road, Turriff, 01888 563333, Kirsten.Williams@sac.co.uk

There are useful free resources on the website too:

- Case studies—learning from the experiences of other new entrants.
- Guidance notes—benefit from advice tailored to assist new entrants to farming.
- Also see www.gov.scot/Topics/farmingrural/Agriculture/NewEntrantsToFarming



What's next

The couple have big plans for the coming year *'family, more sheep and more land'*.

They are expecting the arrival of their first child and also plan to increase the size of their flock. They are planning to upgrade more fences and reseed some grass fields and generally continue to upgrade the farm and farmhouse including modernising the kitchen.

Their intention is to erect a polytunnel, which will house the sheep for lambing, as well as being more sheep friendly than the existing buildings. This will also create storage space in sheds used to house sheep currently. They hope to be able to find seasonal grazing which will ease the grazing pressure at home and allow for them to increase their flock.

In addition to keeping more sheep they plan to move all their sheep onto the MV accreditation scheme which will make for easier handling and alleviate the need for the sheep to be kept separately.

