

New Entrants to Farming Programme



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Case Study

Gordon & Louise Walker



‘Enthusiasm, even desperation, to get started could make you jump at the first opportunity.

Think about what you want and whether it is right for you - have a plan.’

A short biog...

Gordon and Louise Walker, purchased East Lugtonridge Farm in autumn 2013 in order to establish a productive beef unit. Neither partner came from a traditional farming family. However, Gordon’s father’s work as a large animal vet ensured plenty of interaction with farms and livestock, igniting a lifelong passion for agriculture.

East Lugtonridge farm extends to approximately 60 hectares of LFA grassland. Although the farm was an ex dairy unit it was rented out for a number of years prior to entry. Soils were hungry for lime and low in phosphate and potash. Since entry, the couple have worked to improve the ground, applying almost 300 tonnes of lime and spreading P & K fertiliser to correct deficiencies. A programme of fencing and drainage is also underway, when time and resources allow.

In their first year in the farm Gordon and Louise calved 10 suckler cows and purchased a

breeding bull. They had to continue with their off farm jobs to help fund farming operations. Today they farm 80 suckler cows and followers, and Gordon has returned to work on the farm full time.

Initially the couple were keen to get cattle numbers up to increase output but they are now working to refine cow type.

They currently work with native breeds of Galloway, Highland and Shorthorn; looking for a cow that can maximise kilos of meat produced from a forage-based system. All calves produce are sought after by regular buyers and sold privately.

What is your main motivation to farm?

Firstly, to have a profitable business and to fulfil a lifelong ambition. Secondly, to establish a low-cost, native-bred, closed suckler herd that will work for the business. We are adamant that each suckler cow has to make a useful contribution to the business or she will not be retained.

What has been your biggest challenge as a new entrant?

Buying the farm left limited funds to allow for investment in livestock. Our ambition was to run an 80 cow suckler cow herd but in 2014 with only 10 cattle to our name that seemed like a distant dream.

We were frustrated that the pace of development of our farming business did not match our ambition. Fortunately we were successful in obtaining Start-Up grant funding which allowed for the rapid growth of the herd.

What hurdles have you had to overcome?

We sold our house in order to finance our ambition to farm and lived for 13 months in a caravan with our young children and pets whilst patiently waiting for a farming opportunity to present itself.

We had to employ some restraint in not jumping at the first farm that came onto the market, instead waiting for a farm that we felt we could manage and that would suit our business plan.

What financial & advisory assistance have you received?

After purchasing the farm we sought consultancy advice in how best to develop the business and a business plan was produced. This was financed through the Scottish Government's Whole Farm Review Scheme.

We farmed for a year without subsidy before applying to the National Reserve where we were successful in obtaining entitlements allowing the business to claim Basic Payment.

We also applied for the Young Farmers Start Up grant and New Entrants Capital grant. Both applications were successful, allowing us to purchase additional cattle and build a livestock shed.



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

- Never stop learning. Attend as many advisory meetings and workshops as possible.
- Look for solutions, not problems!
- Don't be afraid to go your own way.

What are your future ambitions?

- Maintain a healthy suckler cow herd.
- Increase efficiency and becoming a top suckled calf producer based against QMS costings.

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

