

New Entrants to Farming Programme



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Case Study

Gordon Whiteford



'Don't underestimate the hard work and commitment involved.'

'Thinking differently is a must, get the business plan right, review and adapt when required.'

'Enjoy, once you jump in, keep swimming.'

The secret lay with hens

A short biog...

Originally from a dairy farm in Ayrshire, Gordon had 'farming in the blood' but as his family left the industry when he was still young, returning to a family farm was not an option.

He went to SAC Auchincruive in Ayrshire for two years before taking time out to work in Australia and on various farms across Inverness, Nairn and Morayshire. Gordon returned to study for his FBOM at SAC Craibstone. He then took a post on an organic dairy farm.

It was during this time Gordon asked to rent a small area of neighbouring organic land, secured funding, negotiated a supply contract and constructed a 3,000 bird layer hen unit. For greater flexibility, he became self-employed, taking on jobs locally. This provided the time necessary to generate income while allowing more focus on egg production.

An opportunity arose to secure a 10-year tenancy on the Crown Estate - the tenancy was targeted at new entrants.

Gordon compiled his business plan, which was ultimately successful. In 2012 Gordon and his wife, June, took on the holding that extends to 50ha of arable and permanent pasture.

Layer hen numbers have now extend to 14,000 birds. Homegrown crops reduce purchased feed requirements. They have also built-up to near 60 head of cattle and a flock of 100 sheep. This provides an additional source of income while also generating valuable manure for crop production.

What is your main motivation to farm?

"I always wanted to. I had an idea that felt right and couldn't let it go past"

What has been your biggest challenge as a new entrant?

Finance to start-up was stressful. To have confidence in the business plan and go for it is also a big step - every decision involves (calculated) risk.

What hurdles have you had to overcome?

Finding links to good people that can help within industry, including other farmers. At this stage you need people with expertise and those who inspire and challenge.

The recession dropped the organic egg price. “In a way, this was a good thing as it forced another change. Investing in small scale packing equipment and branding our own eggs gave us a local outlet to hoteliers, shops and direct to the public that took out some of that exposure.”

What financial & advisory assistance have you received?

I worked with the SAC Inverness consulting office to produce applications for SRDP grant funding, which has been awarded and gratefully received. This has been a lifeline to allow the business to develop and grow.

Our landlord has also been very supportive of what we are trying to achieve.

I also gained support that allowed me to undertake a Nuffield Scholarship on improving bird welfare within free-range systems. “I’ve met many exciting new contacts through this process. It has also fuelled my interest in more holistic farming.”

We also changed accountant, partly due to our move into a different area, but we’ve also benefited from valuable proactive advice.

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

“Work hard, don’t be silly with money and be flexible. Enjoy the responsibility of being your own boss and being in the fresh air.”



What are your future ambitions?

We’re looking to add value. Those flocks not already certified are in organic conversion. A new grader/packer is also being installed. This will make egg handling more efficient and accommodate different pack sizes easier.

More land would be tempting if it allowed the business to become more self-sufficient. Volatile feed prices significantly hit cash flow.

We are also looking to retain and grow ‘local’ while keeping contact with the big processors. Flexibility and taking opportunities is key.

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

