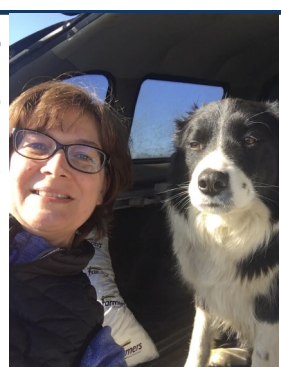


# Case Study: Liz Hamilton

## Women in Agriculture



**Liz Hamilton took on a farming tenancy with her husband and now has passed on the reins to her sons. Liz continues to look after the accounts and records and helps at busy times whilst also working full time off-farm.**



### **Introduce yourself and tell us about your involvement with farming.**

I was born a farmer's daughter, the eldest of four girls living on a mixed beef, sheep and arable farm, three miles west of Linlithgow. I was always tagging along with Dad. I was chief pig feeder, sow farrower, pet lamb feeder, lambing assistant, fleece roller, grain carter, and bale bringer inner.

I married a farmer and moved to Strathaven, South Lanarkshire to a dairy, beef and sheep farm; run in partnership by my husband and his father. I have never really got involved with the dairy side of things at home, just helping out on occasion if they are a man down. I did a lot more with the sheep, with the kids getting involved too. Family days out were spent trailing round the local agricultural shows, showing our Texel sheep with two pens booked for the sheep and one for the kids!! All three of our children are now working in the agricultural industry.

In the summer of 2013, we were offered the tenancy of the farm I was brought up on from my Dad, who had decided he wanted to retire. We asked our middle child, James, what he wanted to do when he left school, he was 16 at the time. When we told him of the opportunity we had been offered he was adamant that farming was what he wanted to do; so hubby and I took the farm on in partnership, on the basis that we couldn't turn down the chance of a lifetime without giving it a bash, even if it was 40 miles from home!

It wasn't easy getting started off with a new business, despite already being involved in the industry. Getting a business reference number took forever, sorting out holding numbers and flock and herd numbers, knowing which government department we needed to talk to for various things was

difficult as we didn't know where to look for this information and it wasn't all held in one place. These various departments don't appear to communicate with one another either. Borrowing capital to get started was difficult, with no land to borrow against. We have managed on a small overdraft, buying second hand, clapped out machinery and trading it in to gradually work our way into better kit.

### **Tell us a bit more about your farm and its enterprises.**

We started off by buying 180 Texel cross ewe lambs privately, from good flocks, with a view to lambing them and running on those that were geld to sell as gimmers the following August. We also bought 80 store lambs which we hoped could be turned over quickly to generate some much needed cash. The ewe lambs gave us different options depending on our cash flow situation at the time but in hindsight we should have bought ewes as this would have meant we would be eligible for LFASS now. We now run a flock of 200 Texel cross and Cheviot Mule ewes, alongside 120 ewe lambs retained, to be sold with lambs at foot, and 40 Cheviot Mule ewe lambs bought in as replacements. These lamb from the end of March to the middle of May. We have built up a suckler herd of 50 cows of mixed breeds and their followers putting them to Charolais and Angus bulls. We started off with young calves still on milk and kept the best of the heifers for breeding and bought in small batches of store cattle, again keeping the better heifers for breeding.

I don't work on the farm any more since our sons left school and both wanted to work at home. I look after the accounts for both businesses and the livestock records for the business I am a partner of whilst providing support at busy times. I work full time as a cashier at Lanark Mart.

**What is your favourite part of farming?**

I particularly enjoy lambing and calving time. It is hard work but exciting too.

**Describe yourself in 3 words**

Hardworking, honest, dependable.

**Describe your farm in 3 words.**

Infuriating, rewarding, home.

**What are your goals and aims for your business in the short term?**

My goal is for our farm business to continue trading and be profitable and provide a decent income for my family who work very hard to produce top quality meat.

**And in the long term?**

To be able to hand over the business in good heart to our children and still have a comfortable retirement ourselves.

**Do you think there are equal opportunities for women and men in agriculture in the UK?**

There are definitely more women becoming involved in agriculture both as farmers and also working for companies who supply and serve the industry.

**How do you think things are changing in UK agriculture for women?**

I think this is something that is continually evolving. In the days before mechanisation women would be very active on farms, working manually alongside their families. Possibly when mechanisation began women switched to a mainly supportive role. Most farmer's wives I know have jobs away from the farm, supporting financially whilst also being involved in the record keeping and accounts and helping out when needed on the farm. Lots more young women are actively farming nowadays and taking on what were traditionally men's roles. For example, auctioneers, sales reps, consultants.

**What are the biggest challenges for Scottish farmers at present?**

Farmers face so many challenges, where do I start? Brexit. The question of whether farming subsidies will continue post Brexit. Will farm gate prices remain high enough to cover our costs? Will we be able to make a decent living and plan for our retirement? Will we be able to make the future of farming attractive to the next generation of farmers? Will we be able to make the general public, our customers, appreciate what we do in looking after our livestock to high standards, maintaining the landscape for them to enjoy and to appreciate the cost of producing their food? Veganism. Can we stop the onslaught of media portraying farmers as destroyers of the planet and murderers of animals?

**Have you implemented any changes on the farm recently? If so, what were they and why?**

We are continually implementing changes in an effort to make things easier and more efficient. We have an old steading which needs modernising to accommodate the larger machinery we have nowadays. We have adapted sheds to suit how we want to work. We have planned and built a cattle and sheep handling system that can be worked by someone working on their own. We have trialled different crops, different breeds of cattle and sheep to determine what works best for us.

**What do you think your farm does well?**

My husband is very good at selecting stock and being able to adapt as he needs to. It might not happen overnight but things are evolving all the time. He has passed these skills onto our children.

**What are you particularly proud of in your farm?**

I am proud that we produce quality livestock.

**What are the constraints to where you are farming?**

Land is our limiting factor. We rent seasonal grazing but it is quite a precarious way to work as there is no security that you will get the same acreage next year but land nearby doesn't come up for sale very often and the weather is everyone's limiting factor!!!

**What hobbies other than farming do you have?**

I don't have time for hobbies although I prefer reading to watching TV and that is what I do to relax.

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For further information about the Women in Agriculture work being done by the Farm Advisory Service, including information on discussion groups, head to [www.fas.scot](http://www.fas.scot) or contact us on 0300 323 0161.

