

New Entrants to Farming Programme



National Advice Hub
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Case Study

Michael and Fiona Burns



“Don’t be discouraged if you are knocked back, follow your dream and keep motivated.”

Pragmatism Coated with Enthusiasm and Determination

A short biog...

Michael and Fiona are enjoying their first years’ farming their 114 hectare tenancy at Glenside Farm (plus 52 ha seasonal let), with their two young children, Katie and Robert.

Both Michael and Fiona are from farming families, and have spent the last seven years working towards securing a farm tenancy. A Forestry Commission Starter Farm Tenancy became available for tender in March 2013, and they jumped at the chance.

They submitted a business plan in April 2013 before being selected for interview in June. The couple found out two weeks later that they had been successful - moving into the Ayrshire farmhouse in September to begin their 10 year tenancy.

Since this time they have built up a flock of 250 Blackface and Cheviot cross breeding ewes, along with 8 Limousin and 18 Galloway cattle on the grassland unit.

It has been a juggling act with the farm, a young family and Michael keeping on his full time job. Both Michael and Fiona work on the farm part-time and work in partnership.

What is your main motivation to farm?

It is a good lifestyle for the family and we have our own personal goal to establish a successful farm business.

What has been your biggest challenge as a new entrant?

There have been a few challenges ranging from, the lack of additional Scottish Government funding for new entrants at the time, to competing with established farmers to buy livestock at the local auction mart.

What hurdles have you had to overcome?

Providing a strong enough application to even get an interview was our first hurdle. Once we had secured the tenancy we had to set up the business, and settle into the lifestyle.

What financial & advisory assistance have you received?

Michael and Fiona put together the initial business plan for the tenancy with the assistance of our local agricultural consultant. She had previous experience of Forestry Farm bids and provided excellent assistance.

Our consultant also assisted with gathering the documentation required for the bank. The Royal Bank of Scotland has been very supportive with finance and suggesting useful contacts. It really is worth looking round for someone that is enthusiastic about the business.

Parents and siblings have provided advice along with some financial support. When we were first awarded the tenancy we received small financial gifts from various family and friends, which all helped to establish the farm. That support network means a lot!



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

Ensure you know your business plan inside out before an interview for a tenancy or meeting with the bank manager so you are prepared for questions.

It will enable you to give stronger answers as this reflects on you and your business understanding. It demonstrates your enthusiasm and gives confidence to the other parties who are effectively investing in your ability.

You will need to work hard but it will be worth it.

What are your future ambitions?

Our future goal is to save enough money to put towards a future tenancy. Having already been through the process with this tenancy we feel this will provide a competitive edge in any future application.

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