

New Entrants to Farming Programme



National Advice Hub
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Case Study

Stuart Rutherford



“You have got to want it, keep focused.”

Prior Experience and Sharp Focus

A short biog...

Stuart graduated from the Scottish Agricultural College Auchincruive campus in 2005, with an HND in Poultry Production and Management.

His career has seen him work for Grampian Country Chickens and Scotlay Farm Eggs. Stuart managed Scotlay Farm Eggs before setting up his own company - Nith Valley Free Range Eggs in March 2009. He supplied eggs to Scotlay Farm Eggs before becoming a co-director in 2011.

Since 2012 he has concentrated solely on his own business, which he is the sole director. The business started on a 10 acre rented site with 4,000 free range hens, increasing to 9,000 hens by 2011 and 14,000 hens today.

In 2013, Stuart took the step of purchasing 30 acres of land around a disused sandstone quarry and relocated his business. The laying houses are located in a woodland site,

which gives a point of difference when it comes to marketing his eggs.

In 2010 Stuart won a Princes Trust, Young Entrepreneur Award. See www.nithvalleyeggs.co.uk for more details.

What is your main motivation to farm?

I enjoy what I do. There are lots of different aspects to the job - from being

- (1) an egg producer,
- (2) a company director and
- (3) a marketing manager.

Being self employed and in charge of your daily schedule is also a big motivation.

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

Being self employed is hard work. Holidays and weekends off are a luxury (especially when you first start)

- you have got to want it!

What has been your biggest challenge as a new entrant?

Everything!

The equipment required in egg production is all very expensive.

The purchase of land to secure the future of the business has been a real challenge.

What hurdles have you had to overcome?

My biggest hurdle to date has been around the purchase of land in 2013. My bank demanded an unachievable deposit and in the end I had to change banks.

This was eclipsed by problems around planning permission: prior to purchasing the site, a planning query was lodged with the Council to make sure the hen houses could be built on the site, no objections were raised. When Planning Consent was applied for, it was turned down. It took a great deal of time, determination and money to have the decision overturned.

If I'd failed it would have been devastating for the business.

What financial & advisory assistance have you received?

The egg industry isn't supported by subsidy. I've used my own savings and I'm very grateful to my parents for their financial help in getting me started. I haven't had any specific consultancy advice - I worked in the industry and managed other people's businesses before starting my own.



What are your future ambitions?

My main goal is to improve the marketing of our eggs and to gain a much higher share of the retail price. I've purchased a grading machine and I'm now able to sell direct to retailers with eggs under my own branding rather than sell into the wholesale market.

I'm also looking at "egg vending machines" which have been very successful in Ireland: it allows a direct link to the consumer and a further point of difference over the opposition.

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

