

Case Study: Jane Isaacson

Women in Agriculture



Jane Isaacson runs a 34 hectare traditional and biodiverse farm, alongside her 'day job' and up and coming ice cream business 'Highland Fold Ice Cream'. In this interview she tells us about how she came to own her croft, how she diversified to start her ice cream business and her plans for the future.

Introduce yourself and tell us about your involvement with farming.

'I was brought up on a croft in Glengarry, Inverness-shire where my family ran an outdoor holiday centre. We bred pedigree welsh black cattle and we always had one or two on the go as house cows, so I learned to milk when I was about ten years old. I remember going out with a hurricane lamp in the winter to do the evening milking in the dark – I loved the sound of the milk in the bucket and the cows munching their hay.

We also had Highland ponies that we crossed with Icelandic's and ran long-distance trail rides around the west coast. I left home at 30 and took a bunch of these ponies to Tiree where I ran pony trekking for 15 years.

I dreamed all my adult life of having my own croft or small farm and a small herd of cows. I moved back to the mainland when my kids left home and



that's when I was lucky enough to get the amazing opportunity to lease this lovely farm in Barcaldine. I was in the right place at the right time. I have known my landlady all my life and just happened to be

looking for a home in the area when she was looking for a tenant.'

What is your favourite part of farming?

'I enjoy most of what I do on the farm, but I love working with the cows especially milking in the morning - it's so peaceful and I play music to the cows. It's such a great way to start the day.'

Have you ever come across sexism in farming?

'Yes, from time to time I have not been taken seriously because of my gender. Usually by men and women not within the farming industry. I find that difficult and avoid those people because most people are really encouraging and respectful and treat you as equal.'

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

'The opportunities are probably all there but whether women get the same chances within that is questionable.'

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

'I definitely think things are changing and it's wonderful to see so many female farmers starting up on their own and being incredibly successful, particularly with livestock.'

What are the biggest challenges for Scottish farmers at present?

'I think uncertainty of Brexit is a worry for everyone, unstable prices in the ring, and effects of climate change causing high feed prices, flooding, failed crops etc. are also challenging.'

What are your goals and aims for your business?

'I will continue to improve my pasture and build my herd of Highland cattle up to 14 milking cows, so my ice cream business becomes sustainable. I want to keep making improvements to my farm infrastructure to properly and safely manage the number of cattle. I want to increase provision from my soft fruit cage and create an orchard to provide fruit and nuts for the ice cream business. I would eventually like establish an ice cream parlour on the farm and plan to try some pop-up events over the next year to see the response from customers. Overall, I want the farm and the business to contribute to the community and create some jobs.'

Have you implemented any changes on the farm recently?

'I have converted the old sheep shed into facilities for milking my Highlanders and converted the old stable into a production unit to make ice cream from their milk. I have also started to reorganise the fences to suit the cattle as the farm was previously mostly set up for horses.'

Are you interested in the environment?

'I am interested in the environment and have wonderful mixed woodland right in the centre of the farm that the cattle can roam in during the winter. In the coming years I hope to have woodland at the edge of each field. I am very interested in tree-hay and want to learn more about this and whether it is something I can

produce on the farm.'

Do you have any farm diversification enterprises?

'I founded an ice cream business in 2017 called Highland Fold Ice Cream (www.highland-fold.co.uk) that I run in my spare time, making ice cream on the farm and selling at events and to local shops and restaurants.'



What do you think your farm does well?

'The mix of natural permanent pasture, woodland, plenty of water and roaming space really allows my Highland cattle to thrive. I finished a bullock last year ready for slaughter which was a great achievement and would like to start selling Highlander beef alongside the ice cream.'

What are you particularly proud of in your farm?

'I am really proud of my six milking Highlanders – Morag, Pixi, Flora, Daisy, Sileas and Bannarach – they are so gentle and have taken to the routine so well and their milk has a very high butterfat content (8%+) which makes the very best of ice cream. I have had consistently good feed-back and production and sales are increasing all the time. I also have three lovely heifers which I am training for milking – Eilidh, Evie and Ester – they're only young but they already know the routine, they'll go to the bull in a year and a half and eventually join the ice cream girls.'

What are the constraints to where you are farming?

'I am still having to work to pay for all the set up costs and although I love my job I am impatient to be able to spend more time on the farm and grow the ice cream business. I hope to be able to give up my 'day-job' and be full time on the farm by the end of 2020.'

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 or contact us on 0300 323 0161.

