

Case Study: Jo Wallace Women in Agriculture



Jo Wallace is a vet and owns Machars Veterinary Services, Wigtownshire. Together with husband Wylie and three young children, they farm the 300 acre Whitehills Farm in Sorbie, and run a herd of 150 predominantly Simmental cross suckler cows. Here she tells us more about her vet practice and her role in farming.

Introduce yourself and tell us about your involvement with farming.

‘I grew up near Stranraer, Wigtownshire on a farm. My dad and uncle worked two halves of the same farm: my dad as a horse dealer and my uncle as a dairy farmer. I spent a lot of time working with the horses at home whilst I was at school, before going to Glasgow University to study Veterinary Medicine.

After graduating I began working as a mixed practice vet in Whithorn, Wigtownshire where I met and then ultimately married my husband Wylie. Together we farm Whitehills Farm, Sorbie which is approximately 300-acres and we run a herd of 150 suckler cows, predominantly Simmental crosses.

In 2019 I founded Machars Veterinary Services. Initially this was as a large animal only ambulatory practice, but in June 2019 I opened a mixed practice offering veterinary care for all species and employing an all-female team comprising three vets, two nursing assistants and a receptionist.’

How did you get into agriculture/farming?

‘Having been brought up on a farm my interest in agriculture has always been a fairly natural thing. At university my attention was primarily focused on the farm and equine side, and after graduation I discovered that it was farm work which was my real passion!’

Tell us a bit more about your business.

‘Machars Veterinary Services is a mixed practice offering veterinary care for all species. We are a three-vet, all-female practice and our workload is approximately 70% farm, 25% small animal, 5% equine. We have a strong focus on customer services and strive to offer high standards of care at all times. All three vets at MVS (myself, Hilary McKie and Eleanor McCracken) are all mixed practitioners and married to farmers with young children at home!’

What is your favourite part in farming?

‘I love the great outdoors – the fresh air and physicality of farm work is good for the soul! I enjoy working with livestock, particularly cattle, but above all I enjoy the

working relationship and friendships that I have with my farming clients.'

Have you ever come across sexism in farming?

'Female vets are often subjected to comments such as 'dinnae send that wee lassie' when it comes to some of the more physically challenging jobs we have to do on farm! I've been very fortunate in that the majority of my clients have worked very capable female vets who paved the way before me. And now at Machars Vet Services we are all women!

Nothing gives me greater pleasure than making a 'difficult calving' look easy in front of a farmer who told me 'if I can't turn it, you won't be able to!' But equally, I always let any chivalrous client carry my heavy equipment back to the car for me too... you've got to take the perks when they're offered!

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

'Without a doubt women are taking much more active roles in agriculture. We live in a society now where far fewer women want to stay at home in the traditional 'housewife' role, and few farms can afford that luxury either.

Many of the farms we work with now have at least one female member of staff or a wife/daughter who is actively farming. In my experience women are also often the instigators and entrepreneurs of any diversification on the farm too!

What are your goals and aims for your business?

'We purchased premises at the end of 2019 which we hope to develop through this year and next. The aim is to purpose-build premises within the next two years. We'd also like to keep growing the client base of the practice and continue expanding our combined skill set to offer our clients the very best service we can!'

"In my experience women are also often the instigators and entrepreneurs of any diversification on the farm too!"

What hobbies other than farming do you have?

'I'm a huge rugby fan and will take up the position of President of Newton Stewart RFC in April this year, a role I'm really proud of and looking forward to immensely! I'm also a keen runner and currently in training for the Edinburgh Marathon which I'm running in aid of MacMillan Cancer Research.

Aside from that life is always busy looking after my three young children and I try to spend as much time as possible with them.'

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.

