

Case Study: Katherine McIntosh

Women in Agriculture



Katherine McIntosh is a farmer in the Scottish Borders, farming with her husband, Stewart, and two young children. They farm 2,500 acres with 1800 ewes and 100 pedigree Galloway cows. She tells us a bit more about their business, her role within it and what makes her proud to be a farmer.

Introduce yourself and tell us about your involvement with farming.

‘I’m 35 years old from near Hawick in the Scottish Borders. My qualifications include a BSC (Hons) in Rural Enterprise and Land Management from Harper Adams, having also worked as an animal health advisor for Carrs Billington Agriculture before returning home to farm in partnership with my husband Stewart. First and foremost I am mum to Grace and Sarah as like most farming families, family is at the centre of everything we do. It’s what gives us purpose and drive to do what we do 24/7 365 days a year. I come from a farming background and have always held an interest in agriculture; it is fair to say that it’s in my blood and farming for me is like living the dream and doesn’t feel like a job and more a way of life.’

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

‘Our farming business stretches over 2500 acres and is predominantly hill ground that does benefit well from good fields. In the last couple of years we have moved farms due to the hill ground on our previous farm

being planted by the Landlord thus taking out the backbone of the business. We were fortunate enough to gain new MLDT tenancies a short distance away and having gone through a rigorous selection process we are now joint tenants of our current farms. We own a small farm as well. We run 1800 ewes, Blackface (Lanark type), North Country Cheviots, South Country Cheviots and a small Pedigree flock of Kerryhills. We breed all our own replacements and sell surplus ewe lambs either privately or through the auction system. Wether lambs are either sold store or fat depending on trade. We have 100 pedigree Galloway cows, 1/3 bred pure and 2/3 crossed with the Beef Shorthorn. Galloway heifers are retained for breeding with any surplus sold on for breeding. Shorthorn cross heifers are sold for breeding too, some as bullers and others with Aberdeen Angus or Limousin calves at foot. All bullocks are fattened on farm and sold through Woodhead Brothers Turriff supplying Morrisons super markets. If we have Galloway bull calves that meet the grade we produce them for the society sale at Castle Douglas. We have recently

established a small Pedigree Beef Shorthorn herd as well. From a cropping point of view we make approximately 100 acres of big bale silage to feed the cattle through the winter and hay if the weather allows.'

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What is your favourite part of farming?

'It is fair to say that my favourite part of farming is breeding quality livestock and seeing how new bloodlines influence the flocks and the herd. Also teaching Grace her trade which she has taken to like a duck to water is a joy to us both. New born Sarah will hopefully enjoy the farming life too.'

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

'Yes I do think there are equal opportunities for women and men within UK farming, especially with the progress of technology. It has moved away from being focussed on being purely a physical job. Some of the best stock people I know are women. Sometimes I feel that the greatest obstacle to women in farming is themselves- don't think of yourself as being different just try to think of yourself as a farmer simply doing your job. You're as good as or better than any man in farming!'

How do you think things are changing in UK agriculture for women? Are the roles of women switching from a "support" farmer's wife type role to a more active role?

'Yes roles are changing from the traditional farmer's wife making meals and doing housework, not only is she still doing that but she is perhaps looking after sheep, cattle, taking children to school etc. Not to mention sitting behind a desk in the farm office with the ever increasing burden of paperwork or even holding down a part time or full time job. With less labour employed on farms, farming couples have to work as a team, no one individual shining above the other but playing to individuals strengths in what is a very challenging industry.'



What are you particularly proud of in your farm?

'I am particularly proud of the stock that we produce and our recent achievements in gaining new tenancies. In particular I am proud of my husband Stewart for his hard work, knowledge and resilience to get where we are today as a farming family.'