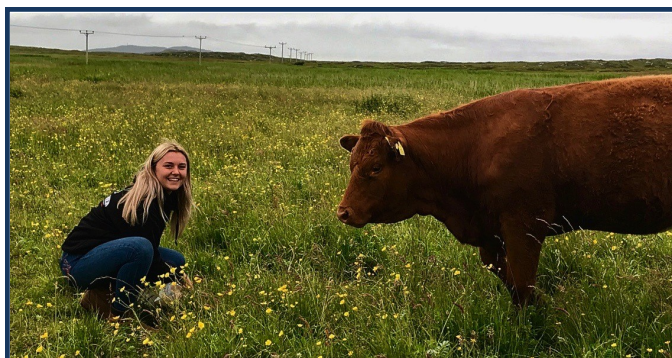


# Case Study: Kirsteen MacKinnon

## Women in Agriculture



Kirsteen MacKinnon, aged 19, runs Parkhouse croft with her father on the Isle of Tiree, Argyll. Kirsteen is heavily involved in the running of the croft as well as their haulage and contracting business. With ambitions to breed pedigree cattle and recently completing an HNC in Agriculture, Kirsteen has big plans for her future.

### Where are you from? Did you grow up on a farm?

I'm from the Isle of Tiree, Argyll. It is the outer most island of the Inner Hebrides: the sunniest and windiest place in the UK. Parkhouse is a croft that has always been in the family. My grandpa ran it before my dad took over from him when I was younger. Right now me and my dad work together running the place, as a partnership, but in the future I will inherit it.

### Describe your farm in numbers.

Parkhouse is a croft which extends to just over 36ha. It also benefits from Common Grazing shares and we have several seasonal leases. In total we manage about 150ha. We have a herd of 40 breeding cows and followers.

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

We have the croft but also have a haulage and contracting firm; I. A. MacKinnon Haulage. I'm heavily involved with both businesses; driving lorries and tractors, contract baling, as well as the agricultural aspects of running cattle. We are the sole suppliers of livestock feeding on Tiree and

also supply hay and straw to the island and our neighbouring island of Coll. The contracting and haulage side of the business is very busy and our main enterprise.

### How did you get into agriculture/farming?

From a very young age I was always out helping my dad and getting in amongst things. I grew up in and out of lorries, diggers and tractors. I got my first calf



when I was about 6 and since then I've loved working with cattle. We don't have any sheep but I go and help a local farm at lambing and shearing. I do all the admin and record keeping for the agricultural business and started this when I was about 16.

### What is your favourite part of farming?

I love most of it except when things don't go to plan but in this business you grow up knowing nothing is ever simple, especially when sheep, cows and machinery are involved. But my favourite

part is just working with the animals and working outside. I've always preferred being outside getting dirty, or working in a tractor than inside doing the paperwork.

### **Have you ever come across sexism in farming?**

I guess sometimes people who aren't from the island are quite surprised when I turn up in the tractor and trailer when delivering. Also when folk come to collect feeding they try to stop me from lifting the bags and say 'oh surely you can't manage that?'. I was once told the farming and contracting business is no place for a woman because it's the furthest thing from being ladylike, but I just laughed.

### **What are your goals and aspirations for yourself?**

I have just completed my HNC Agriculture at SRUC Oatridge and I am now going on to do my degree. I plan on running both businesses and build up the quality of my herd. I'd also like to start breeding some pedigree cattle and reintroduce sheep to the business.

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### **Have you implemented any changes on the farm recently? If so, what were they and why?**

Currently all our cows are out-wintered. With the change in the weather with winters getting so much wetter, we are building a new cattle shed.

This will allow us to in-winter cattle. The shed will include bull pens and calving pens which will give us more scope to increase the numbers, improve animal welfare, especially at calving, but most importantly get cattle off the fields during winter to protect the grassland. We are also hoping to install a new handling system to make jobs quicker, easier and safer!



### **What are the constraints to where you are farming?**

On Tiree we have very harsh winters which is hard on the animals and our ground. Tiree is so flat there is little shelter for animals and we get hammered by storms. Also due to weather we can never guarantee the boats getting in, which makes it really hard for us to be able to transport the animal feed across, which is why it's important to keep the place very well stocked so that we don't run short. Birds are a big issue on Tiree, especially geese! We are also one of the few places in the UK where corncrake breed which means most of the silage fields are in environmental schemes. This is great for extra income but the constraints can make managing the grazing more difficult and the silage fields can't be cut until at least 1<sup>st</sup> August!

**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](http://www.fas.scot) or contact us on 0300 323 0161.**

