

Case Study: Rhona MacGregor

Women in Agriculture



Rhona MacGregor farms with her husband in Caithness. She is not from a farming background, but having “married into” the industry she has taken it all in her stride. Rhona has been coming along to the Farm Advisory Service Women in Agriculture discussion group in Caithness. In this interview she tells us about her life in farming.

Tell us a bit about your background and farming career.

‘I spent my childhood in the Fort Augustus area before moving to Inverness where, after starting my own family I opened a children’s nursery. I am not from a farming background or had any agricultural experience but having met and married a Caithness farmer, I found myself at the ripe old age of 52 living on a beef and sheep farm nearly 100 miles from my business in Inverness.’

Describe yourself in 3 words.

‘I would say I was hard working, caring and stubborn. I know my other half would agree with at least one of those!’

Tell us a bit more about your farm business.

‘The farm is fragmented and stony, but it is productive. We have 130 suckler

cows and 300 breeding ewes. The total land area is 304 hectares. The business comprises of two separate farms; Latheron Mains and Remiggy Farm, which are two miles apart, and a further 105ha of hill ground at a third location one mile inland. It is all farmed as one unit. This in itself can add to the time you spend each day getting things done. The lambing shed is at Latheron although we live at Remiggy so sometimes it feels like you are constantly back and forth on the road checking on the ewes and lambs.’

“I think that there are more opportunities [than in the past] for women in all areas related to farming, be it running their own croft/farm or being involved with organisations like NFU.”

What is your role on the farm/in the farming business?

I married my Caithness farmer, Jim MacGregor, in 2008 and since then I have commuted to Inverness two or three times a week but I also help out on the farm. I help out all year but I suppose lambing is a busy time for me. I enjoy it even although it is tiring and can be stressful, but it makes it all worthwhile when the fields are full of lambs running and jumping to their hearts content. My other duties range from chasing sheep and cattle, helping at calving and clerking ,to feeding men and women at silage time and shearing, never a dull moment!

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

‘I think, just from watching programmes on farming and going to several farming related shows, that there are more opportunities for women in all areas related to farming, be it running their own croft/farm or being involved with organisations like NFU.’

What are the biggest challenges for Scottish farmers at present?

‘I think at the moment the biggest challenge for Scottish farmers is Brexit and the uncertainty that creates, making forward planning very difficult.’



Are you interested in the environment? If so, what measures do you have on the farm to encourage biodiversity?

‘The farm has been involved in various environmental schemes throughout the past twenty years and will probably continue. I am a strong advocate of enhancing the environment we live and work in, after all we are custodians of the countryside. We do have 16 solar panels on the barn roof and a 6kw wind turbine.’

What are your goals and aims for your business?

‘As we are both contemplating the idea of retiring, we have been looking into different options open to the business which will still enable us to derive some income from the farms. Over the last couple of years, we have reduced the number of breeding ewes and we do not buy in any replacement cows.’

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.



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