

New Entrants to Farming Programme



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Case Study

Robbie Stephen



“Take opportunities when you can”

“go with your heart, it paid off for me”

A short biog ...

Robbie was brought up on a mixed beef and sheep farm in Dallas, Morayshire. After leaving school he started working for several local contractors while still continuing to work on the family farm at weekends. His intention has always been to one day farm himself however the acreage of the family farm hindered this until the opportunity arose to take a full time tenancy on Tombrek. The landlord of Dallas Estate, keen for a young person to take on the land at Tombrek approached Robbie with the offer of creating a full time tenancy.

With a business plan constructed, Robbie was finally successful in gaining loan funding from HSBC after being turned down by numerous other banks.

In November 2015 Robbie stopped contracting full time to take on the 15 year SLDT of Tombrek extending to 52 hectares of permanent grassland and rough grazing with a further 24 hectares let seasonally as summer grazing.

This year 230 ewes went to a Bluefaced Leicester tup to produce Cheviot Mule ewe lambs with the aim for the majority of

these ewe lambs to be sold at breeding sales at the end of August. The wedder lambs will be kept on for finishing. Robbie has recently established a suckler herd, buying four Saler in-calf heifers, with the intention of gradually increasing cow numbers.

Robbie has taken on additional winter grazing on the Estate after the previous winter grazing tenant sadly passed away. This additional land has allowed Robbie to purchase 450 store lambs which he will take through to the Spring market.

What has been your biggest challenge as a new entrant?

The biggest challenge was getting a start in the industry. The next challenge was securing financial backing from a bank. This proved to be difficult, despite having a business plan including a projected cash flow for the next five years.

Robbie struggled to find a bank willing to give him the business loan he needed to allow him to get started. After feeling like he was getting nowhere but determined to continue it was third time lucky when he finally secured financial backing from the banks.



The European Agricultural Fund
for Rural Development
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What hurdles have you had to overcome?

The biggest hurdle was finance. Starting out with no livestock was difficult. With the high value of livestock on top of everything else I had to invest in, it proved hard. Dingwall and Highland Marts were very supportive and couldn't have done more to help with providing finance to allow me to get started.

What is your main motivation?

"It's just what I know. I was brought up into farming"

I like seeing the stock coming through the farm from birth to the sale day. I just like what I do"

What advisory assistance have you received?

I worked with the local SAC Consulting office to firstly produce a business plan to take to banks for initial funding to get started. Thereafter with the assistance of the advisors applications for the Agri-Environment Scheme and New Entrants Start Up Grant were successful. The funding from the New Entrant Start Up Grant was greatly received and has allowed the business to grow with the building of a cattle court and the purchase of a sheep handling system.

"I wouldn't be where I am without the help of the local office advisors."



What financial assistance have you received?

The Basic Payment (BPS) for the farm along with the Less Favoured Area Support Scheme (LFASS) are both claimed by Robbie which gives crucial income to the business.

Robbie was successful in gaining a New Entrants Start Up Grant, with this he built a purpose built cattle court at Tombrek replacing the old steading which was unusable and in a state of disrepair.

Robbie has now applied to the New Entrants Capital Grant and is currently waiting to hear if his application has been successful to assist with improving the land through reseeding and lime application.

What's next

Robbie plans to upgrade the farm's fencing which is greatly needed as well as improve the grassland. He wants to continue in improving the quality of his stock with the aim of making more of a return. He also plans to increase the cattle numbers to approximately ten breeding cows while also investing in cattle handling as there are no cattle handling facilities currently.

Robbie hopes to grow his business further by renting more seasonal land if the opportunity arises.

New Entrants to Farming "get with the" Programme

There is a network of new entrants across the country at various stages of developing their businesses. You can join in:

- www.facebook.com/NewEntrants
- www.fas.scot/new-entrants/
- Regional workshops

For more info contact Kirsten Williams, Consultant, SAC Consulting, Clifton Road, Turriff, 01888 563333, Kirsten.Williams@sac.co.uk

There are useful free resources on the website too:

- Case studies—learning from the experiences of other new entrants.
- Guidance notes—benefit from advice tailored to assist new entrants to farming.
- Also see www.gov.scot/Topics/farmingrural/Agriculture/NewEntrantsToFarming