

The Scottish Government's New Entrants to Farming Programme



David Cooper-Tardoes Farm, Muirkirk

David Cooper took on his first challenge in 2004 when he was just 17. He moved alone from Dartmoor to the 192 ha unit of Tardoes in Muirkirk with 350 Herdwick ewes and 100 hogs. When he purchased the farm it was made up of 103 ha of inbye land and 89 ha of hill however most of the inbye had been opencast and had been poorly restored.

David worked alone in improving the land and infrastructure and operating a maximum health, minimum input sheep system and built the flock up to 700 ewes.

In 2006 the opportunity arose to purchase part of a dilapidated neighbouring estate and 737 ha of mostly rough hill was added to the land area. The sheep numbers were

increased to 1,200 ewes made up of Herdwicks and Welsh Mountain ewes.

In 2010 a further neighbouring hill block of 830 ha was purchased and the sheep numbers were gradually increased to the present number of 3,000 ewes and 700 hogs.

Herdwicks are run on the harder hill land with Welsh Mountain ewes on the better hills. Ewe hogs are wintered on the inbye. All surplus lambs are sold finished as Euro Lamb by November. Draft ewes are all sold privately.

What is your main motivation to farm?

The first is to improve the land and farm and to leave it in a better condition for the next generation.

The second is to remain profitable.

Case Studies

Learn from the experiences of other new entrants in a series of case studies.

Guidance notes are also available which are tailored specifically to assist new entrants to farming, with their business needs.

Find further information, including links to other case studies and the guidance notes, at www.sruc.ac.uk/newentrants

This programme is funded by the Scottish Government as part of its New Entrants to Farming Advisory Activity.



What hurdles have you had to overcome?

The biggest hurdle has been borrowing capital to purchase neighbouring land and expand the business. A robust and realistic business plan is required as well as an excellent working relationship with your lender. You must know your costs and margins.

What financial & advisory assistance have you received?

Farming largely without SFP, David has had to rely on LFASS (Less Favoured Area Support) and has used the SRDP (Scottish Rural Development Programme) to secure environmental payments to manage habitats and capital payments to help cover fencing costs. Approximately 1,510 ha of the land is within a Special Site of Scientific Interest.

What has been your biggest challenge you have faced as a new entrant?

Farming without SFP (Single Farm Payment) on all of the land has meant that the sheep system must be profitable without support payments. David supplements his income by working off farm, as a fencing contractor four days per week.

“Borrow as much money as you can when you are young. It may seem like a lot at the time but in twenty years it will have been a bargain!”

David Cooper



What advice would you give to someone thinking of entering the industry?

- Keep it simple.
- You define the system, don't be defined by others.
- Every farm is different.
- Don't give up.

What are your future ambitions?

To continue to improve the farm as well as the stock and build up sufficient land and sheep numbers to farm full time.

Looking for some more information?

There is a network of new entrants across the country who are in various stages of developing their businesses and achieving their goals. You can contact this network through various streams including:

- Regional workshops
- Facebook
(www.facebook.com/NewEntrants)
- Website
(www.sruc.ac.uk/newentrants)

For more details contact

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