

I leapt at the chance to be here today, at such a great conference but since agreeing to speak, I have spent the preceding 6 months wondering what on earth I have to say of interest or inspiration to such an esteemed audience.

I must say to all scholars – I was in your shoes last year, you could be in my shoes next year, so beware.

### **WHO AM I**

First and foremost Who am I? I am a 30 year old dairy farmer from the South East of Scotland where I work alongside my parents and 2 members of staff on our 1,000acre upland farm. We're milking 300 pedigree Holstein cows and run 1600 breeding ewes. You won't hear much more about the sheep enterprise as it is within the dairy industry that I'm at my happiest and am most passionate about.

### **MAP**

This is an overview of the farm, with Clackmae in red and the additional grass lets we take from a neighbouring farm shown in blue. As you can see we are predominantly a grassland farm, with some arable silage grown. We have heavy clay soils which present rotation challenges to us! Our sheep flock along with silage making are our grassland managers.

The farm is run on a very intensive system, as you can see from the map the farm buildings are all on the Easternmost edge of the farm. Milking our cows extensively would require considerable investment in cow tracks and infrastructure and with the heavy soils it is very difficult to graze for extended periods of time, even on a paddock system. Instead we moved away from extensive and chose to invest in technology and we now house the milking herd for 365 days of the year. It was a management choice and we have found we are better at intensive than extensive systems.

I hope that gives you a small flavour of the farming background that I come from.

Today I'm here to talk to you about some of the opportunities in the dairy industry that I as a young person have been able to take advantage of but a lot of what I have to say is applicable to all sectors within agriculture and is more about mentality and approach to life. To start with though I thought it would be helpful to define opportunity.

### **OPPORTUNITY**

A time or set of circumstances that makes it possible to do something.

A favourable or advantageous circumstance or combination of circumstances

A chance for progress or advancement

Basically it seems that an opportunity is anything you want it to be – old adage, no such thing as problem, only an opportunity.

### **HOUSTON...**

Within the dairy industry there has been huge expenditure on R&D and the advancement of technology. As dairy farmers we have an incredible opportunity to take advantage of these investments. For me specifically this has included:

### **TECHNOLOGY & R&D**

- Reproductive technologies –

- sexed semen, great opportunity to improve the herd by breeding your best animals to sexed semen and almost guarantee female replacements. We run a closed herd and so rely on getting enough heifer replacements year on year. Our bull calves are sold either finished for veal or into the store trade, dependent on price so there is still a place for them but it is heifer replacements that we are chasing.  
75% sexed is a economical alternative which we use on our maiden heifers.
- synchronisation, there are a number of synchro programmes out there and have been for a number of years. More recently the OvSynch programme has been brought over from the USA. We now rely on it for use within the milking herd. On the maiden heifers we recently tried the 5 day CIDR protocol 75% sexed semen was used on these rather than 100% sexed as it was more cost effective and gives better conception rates.
- Management techniques – AND tools  
KPI's or key performance indicators, are being discussed more and more. Alongside benchmarking they are a great tool for monitoring your own progress year on year but also for comparing yourself with others. Attention to detail is key whether you are an intensive or extensive system and using these tools allows you to home in on the details that need the most focus. KPI's and benchmarking have been around for a long time in other industries and professions and it is an area that agriculture still has a lot of room for improvement, but it is nonetheless an opportunity for improvement.
- staff management, motivation, training are all given far more emphasis today than they seem to have been given historically. I am great with cows and not so great with staff so for me, having much more awareness is an opportunity to improve my own management of the team at home.
- Management Software  
The availability of custom made, farm focused software is a fantastic opportunity to allow the areas of the business to be focused on. Within the dairy I use 3 different programmes on a daily basis and without them I couldn't monitor herd health, yields and all the other crucial elements involved in a dairy herd, without being physically hands on and milk every cow myself every day.
- Equipment development –

- Automatic scrapers, heat detection, pasteuriser, 6 months ago we installed a milk pasteuriser. Studies that I have read seemed to show that calves perform best when fed on whole milk. To allow us to do this without the risk of disease being spread we pasteurise all the milk and colostrum that is fed to our calves. Milk pasteurisation has been occurring for decades but it is still relatively recently that farm level pasteurisation has become more common place. As a result of pasteurising we now have clean colostrum for sale to other livestock farmers, an opportunity we didn't have before.

All of this may seem blindingly obvious to most of you, but remember I'm only 30 and still have a lot to learn.

This brings me to the most significant investment in new technology that we have made at Clackmae:

- robots,

## **ROBOTS PHOTO**

3 Lely Astronaut Robots were installed in 2009 when I graduated and came home from college. I had seen robots in action at the Dairy Event around 10 years ago and decided they were the way forward for our herd. The opportunity of actually buying robots arose when a number of 2<sup>nd</sup> hand boxes became available so we bought 2 second hand and 1 brand new to milk half the herd. They have completely changed the way I manage my cows as a holistic approach is now taken instead of focussing on the udder and rear 2 legs which is all you tend to see in a parlour. We still have a 20:20 herringbone for the other half of the herd.

Many of you will be asking – why did we not go 100% robotic in one go. Quite simply it would have been a waste of an investment we have made in the parlour over the years. The parlour itself is 17years old but we have continued to invest in it, first by extending it and then by installing automatic self cleaning and teat dipping clusters. To shut the parlour down would have been a wasted investment as the second hand value of parlours is limited. Pre-empting another question, yes I will go entirely robotic, with my specific aim being by 2020. We have tightened up our breeding goals with far more focus on teat placement and feet and legs to make sure that all of our cows are 100% suited to a robotic system. Installing robots is undoubtedly the best thing I have ever done for my cows and I am counting the days down until we go fully robotic.

## **TELLING THE FARMING STORY**

I firmly believe that we as farmers are the best ambassadors and salesmen for our industry and our produce. As such I am involved with the charity, Royal Highland Education Trust, run by the Royal Highland Society in Scotland. RHET, of which the Princess Royal is a patron, does crucial work in Scotland bringing school children onto farms and getting farmers into schools to talk about where our food comes from. By bringing school children onto

Clackmae, to see how we farm, preconceptions and misunderstandings are removed and the children go away with a far better grasp of what role farmers play in the countryside. It is an incredibly heart warming and uplifting experience sharing my daily job with children. Challenging at times when you are asked exactly how many glasses of milk do your cows produce each day and .

I saw RHET as an opportunity not only to educate young people about food production but also to highlight how advanced agriculture is as an industry with the hope that it may be considered as a career choice when the time comes. We must stop the attitude that agriculture is for non-achievers. A young boy from the local school worked for us at weekends and when asked what he wanted to do as a career he answered "if I pass my exams I'll become a builder, but if I fail them I'll work on a farm". In order for us as an industry to keep progressing we need skilled, motivated people and not have a career in agriculture viewed as a last resort. This is not reserved solely for jobs on the farm but also relates to the wider industry. We need agronomists, nutritionists, bankers, vets, salesmen and even politicians who understand our industry, are passionate about agriculture and who ultimately are good at what they do. This will only come about with agriculture being held up as an attractive career path in a vibrant and progressive sector. My own experience saw me begin a degree course in simply because I got good grades at high school and was told to look at vet, medicine or law. I lasted 2 years before I realised this was not how I wanted to spend my life. How many others are encouraged down that path without giving agriculture a second thought?

Being involved with RHET has been a 2 way street as I have also benefitted by being reminded of the consumer attitude towards farming, there is nothing like children to take you back to basics and force you to step back and look at your job through their eyes.

RHET isn't the only way that I tell the farming story. We have a multitude of visitors through the gates at Clackmae every year. From vet and SRUC students from Edinburgh to passers-by on holiday and locals walking their dogs, everyone is interested and keen to learn about what we do. I am lucky to live in a rural location and take every opportunity to share my farming story..

A number of the photos in my presentation today are from a photographer I met by chance during an interview I was giving about young farmers. He expressed an interest in taking photos of cows and has subsequently been given free reign to walk around the farm taking photos of cows. He had a good attitude towards agriculture to start with but is positively shouting our case now as a result of the welcome he's had from me.

A number of you will have come through the ranks of young farmers. Whether it is SAYFC/NFYFC/Wales YFC or YFCU, being involved as a member is another great opportunity to tell the farming story and bring the consumer closer to the food chain. By talking amongst your peers within young farmers, who may have little or no experience of farming, you can convey with passion and enthusiasm just what our industry is all about.

**A PROBLEM SHARED IS A PROBLEM HALVED**

Not only do I believe we must be open with our consumers but I also firmly believe in being open with each other about challenges we are facing in our own businesses. I'm not suggesting that we all come to the Oxford Farming Conference and stand on a soap box and shout out for all and sundry what is going wrong for you but by making use of the numerous discussion groups, monitor farms, Planning for Profit, benchmarking, farming connect sessions that are run up and down the country.

I totally changed the management of my fresh calved cows as a result of hearing a speaker at a Muller Wiseman producer day, they are now held in a separate pen for 7 days after calving and have their temperatures checked daily. I've seen a dramatic improvement in fertility, yield and transition to the milking herd as a result, all from hearing 1 person and realising that I could improve on what I did at home.

My newborn calf management also changed as a result of a monitor meeting with calves now getting 4-5L colostrums at birth and another 3L 8 hours later. My calf health was good before but the calves seem bomb proof now. I've already mentioned the pasteurisation of milk and this again came out of a discussion group meeting.

But this only comes from the ability to listen & trust – I am often told I am young and naïve, and haven't had enough life experience to be cynical. You may all think I'm living a delusional dream of youth with an honest and open relationship with one and all but I firmly believe we can only learn from each other by being honest – the only person you're kidding is yourself!

### **GOOD TO TALK COWS...**

Beyond the industry specific discussion groups we also have to talk to each other across industries and educate each other. As farmers we are all too often ignorant of the role the different sectors play.

Scottish beef industry is reaching crisis point at the moment. CAP negotiations include the continuing of the Scottish Beef Calf Scheme. Under current rules, to qualify for a payment, the calf must have 75% beef genetics. As part of the consultation the question is being asked whether this should be lowered to 50% beef genetics to take in the dairy cross-breds. If this was the case we would change our breeding policy, along with a number of other dairy producers I suspect, which would allow us to apply for the SBCS. The fear from beef producers is that this weakens the Scotch beef brand but ironically I think this would help safeguard the Scottish brand by increasing throughput through Scottish abattoirs and gaining critical mass which makes it economical for these abattoirs to operate. It is an example of a discussion that needs to take place so that as an industry, we speak with one voice instead of us all talking at cross-purposes. The New entrants to agriculture lobby is also a classic example with mistrust left right and centre. I consider myself a new entrant to agriculture – I am still learning how to run a large business rather than having started small myself and grown with it. Yet many in the industry would deny my claim to being a genuine new entrant as I have had the luck and fortune of being born into an owner occupier farming family. Yes I may have had the support and understanding of my family more than

someone from outwith the industry may have experienced but I have equally had to prove myself as worthy of farming as they will.

In the last year I have welcomed numerous study tours mainly from Wales and it never ceases to amaze me how different all our farming practices are, not only across our sectors but also across our regions but we all have something to learn from each other – sometimes it is simply as an affirmation that our system is right for us.

### **AN OPPORTUNITY GRASPED**

You will hear it so often but it is amazing how far sheer-will power and a can do attitude will take you. Success is so often about your mind-set.

As I stated at the beginning, an opportunity is whatever you choose to make it, as long as you are be open minded and unlike this man you do have to think outside the box at times.

### **OUTSIDE THE BOX**

By always being open to new ideas, opportunities will come your way but don't do something for the sake in doing it. If you're heart isn't in it then you are doomed to failure.

My own opportunity came as a result of my robots. As a robot farmer, dealing with brand new technology and discovering that there were precious few places for you to go for that advice, I had to find out for myself, there was no one offering advice for those of us milking through robots. This was my Gap in the market...

### **PHOTO 416 & ROBOT**

Having climbed the steepest learning curve of my life and learning how to manage cows on robots, I decided to offer that experience to other farmers starting up with robots and started up my robot advisory service in 2012.

When I first started out I had intended to cover all robots, that were available in the UK at the time Lely, DeLaval and Fullwood. I wasn't full-time at home due to my commitment to SAYFC as National Chairman and was looking for additional work and a further challenge. The situation at home subsequently changed and so I scaled back my ambition and now work only with Lely famers. I cover the entirety of Scotland excepting Dumfries and Galloway and every new robot start-up will be advised by me.

I didn't want to become an agricultural consultant, robots and the dairy industry are what I'm enthusiastic about and I'm also far too busy with the home farm. There are now more people starting up and offering robot advice, SAC consulting are training their consultants up and numerous feed companies are training their nutritionists up but I am still unique in that I am running robots myself at home. For me the whole process was an obvious one but still daunting nonetheless. But

### **FISH BOWL PHOTO**

If you want something in your life you've never had, you'll have to do something you've never done. J.D Houston

I took a leap of faith. It cost me very little financially but the risks to my name and reputation were huge. Farming is a small world and all it will take is some bad advice or advice mis-interpreted and the opportunity I grasped could be lost. But carrying out this role

offers me the opportunity to stay motivated, to keep myself up-to-date with robot developments and keeps me out an about in the country at large, allowing me to see the wood from the trees at home.

What does the future hold – more change inevitably, with that will bring opportunity for each and every one of us, it is down to the individual to take advantage of it as is seen fit. For me, I have had one door close as my time in Young Farmers comes to an end and I am enjoying focussing on my own cows and helping others focus on theirs while I wait and see what new doors open.

### **FINAL COW PHOTO**

Some of the opportunities I have covered have been very specific to my situation whilst others have been more abstract I hope you have been able to relate to some if not all of them and you have been inspired to go home and make the most of an opportunity you have, no matter how small or large.

Please be like this lady, come and speak to me, quiz me and challenge me. There is nothing better than a good discussion to shape your own views and path for the future, who knows what new opportunities may come from a simple conversation.

Thank you.