



# Sutherland Farm is Social Media Star

Social media, in particular Facebook, has had a huge impact on **Joyce Campbell's** farming business at Armadale in Sutherland, which was revealed as the **Scottish Sheep Farm of The Year** at Agriscot in November.

One of the judges of the competition, Richard Blake from sponsors Thorntons, said that what separated Armadale from the other three finalists was the way the farm was "showcased to a national and international audience by way of social media".

He also highlighted the "fantastic community engagement" and the "regular dialogue with multiple retailers resulting in the re-introduction of Scotch Lamb PGI on local shelves" achieved by the use of social media.

Joyce Campbell, who came home to run the family farm when she was just 20 years old, said it was the first time she had entered a competition and was thrilled to win, but what pleased her even more was the reaction from the local community at such an award coming to the area.



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The 5600 acre farm runs from the beautiful beach at Armadale on the north coast of Scotland to about 800 feet above sea level and is exposed to the very worst that the Scottish climate can offer. It is stocked with 800 North Country Cheviot ewes, 250 ewe hogs and 50 stock tups - along with 25 Salers and Salers x Simmental suckler cows.

Joyce's approach successfully combines traditional management techniques with modern ideas and practices to achieve the best results on the fragile peatland habitats and four Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) that form most of the hill ground at Armadale.

"We take grazing and forage management very seriously and consciously keep stock levels very low - currently 0.34 ewes per hectare, which is sustainable for the type of hill ground we have," said Joyce.



From left - Niece Frances Grant, Joyce Campbell and her husband Ian Macleay.



She compensates for the poor hill ground by making the most of the in-bye fields where the focus is on quality, young grass, with the cattle kept largely to complement the sheep enterprise and improve the grazing.

The policy of culling any ewes which have problems at lambing time with mothering, milk or feet has paid off, as Joyce is confident that only the best-performing ewes remain in the flock. She believes that this gives her a marketing edge for draft ewes, which regularly top the market at Lairg and this year set a new centre record of £172 per head for a pen of 102 five-year-old ewes.

Wether lambs and the ewe lambs not retained for breeding are sold at Lairg in August. Joyce said her aim is to sell lambs as she would like to buy them, so they are vaccinated, wormed and treated for ticks and trace elements to make sure they go on to thrive in their new homes. This year the 700 or so lambs sold at the first Lairg sale averaged nearly £64, with all the ewe lambs from the farm bought by breeders.

She has also had success selling tups, with around 20 to 25 sold under the Armadale prefix every autumn. This year at the main breed sale in Lairg her rams attained a top price of £7,500 and averaged £1,890. These tups are all used at home as shearlings and then sold as two shears.

This year she attracted a number of new buyers through profiling her tups on Facebook and Twitter.

Joyce's husband, Ian, is an auctioneer with Aberdeen and Northern Marts so when he is not around, she is helped on the farm by Billy Maclean, who is self-employed and a crofter in his own right, as well as her niece and nephew, 15-year-old twins Frances and Mure.

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It was Frances and Mure who set Joyce up on Facebook two years ago, and no one is more surprised than her that she now has over 3,500 Facebook friends from all over the world. She posts nearly every day and, with the help of the young ones and their friend Stephen Forbes, who films from up above using his drone, she sets videos to music. "I would never have believed that shifting a group of freshly weaned lambs would be of any interest, let alone receive 3.9 million views," said Joyce.

The team at Armadale have become social media hits, filming and documenting the day-to-day events of a remote sheep farm, and Joyce believes that this form of interaction with the public is enabling people to connect with farming.

"We need to become better at telling our story of where and how food is produced, allowing the consumer to put a face and a story to the lamb products that they see daily in supermarkets shelves and butchers shops," Joyce commented.

As well as engaging with and encouraging members of the local community to get involved with the farm, Joyce and her team also work with the local high school at Bettyhill to support their rural skills programme.

She said: "We must be prepared to take the time to pass on all our experience and knowledge. After all, we are only custodians of the land for the next generation and we should try and leave it in as good heart as possible for them. What better way but to involve them, run with their ideas and let them see those ideas come to fruition for themselves."

## Armada Farm, Sutherland: In numbers



Farmed by Joyce Campbell

5,600 acres

800 North Country Cheviot ewes

50 Stock tups

250 Ewe hogs

25 Salers x Simmental suckler cows

