



Although she was pulled in all directions timewise at last month's Royal Highland Show, Scottish Association of Young Farmers' Clubs' (SAYFC) National Member of the Year Abby Forsyth found time to visit the Farmstrong Scotland stand.

"It was really interesting to find out more about Farmstrong and it feels important to say that the organisation's wellbeing messages are for all ages - including the young," says 26-year-old Abby, who grew up on the family farm in Wigtownshire but now lives with her fiancé on his family's farm just outside Annan.

To outsiders, says Abby, young people living and working on Scotland's farms and crofts can appear to have the most marvellous lifestyle. Technology has made many farm tasks less physically demanding and keeping in touch has never been easier thanks to mobile 'phones and social media.

But in stark contrast to this improved connectivity rural isolation can be a very real problem, reflected countrywide with a rise in loneliness since the pandemic.

Farmstrong's baseline research found that of all the age groups questioned, the 25-34-year-old age group reported the highest number of people who felt lonely most of, or some of the time.

It's a subject that Abby is familiar with through her role as Development & Wellbeing Chair for SAYFC. The movement has recently launched a new Respect Campaign, encouraging the importance of being aware of behaviour; both members' own and other people's with the slogan 'respect yourself, respect others'.

"While at the summer shows you see the big groups of young farmers going around and it's easy to imagine they haven't a care in the world, but I often wonder if they are all actually doing ok.

"We are working towards all clubs having somebody who is mental health first-aid trained to be able to ask the kind of open questions that help people describe how they are really feeling. I have so much time for the Farmstrong message that it's no good farming people looking after their

livestock, machinery, soils and so-on but not investing any time in themselves.

"On a personal level I know what a difference it makes to my mental health to go for a run," says Abby, who works as an Agricultural Officer for the Scottish Government's Rural Payments and Inspections Division.

"Some days I'm out and about visiting farms and it's not possible but on other days I'm staring at a screen all day and running is - for me - a brilliant way to think through and process any problems.

"It can be hard to bite the bullet and take that half an hour break from work even though you know it makes you feel better. Workplaces, whether in an office or out on a farm, should make wellbeing, fitness and mental health a priority. It's a culture that needs to change and it's great to see organisations like Farmstrong helping to make that change possible."

Abby's fiancé, beef farmer Niall Goldie, is a keen exhibitor of his family's pedigree Simmentals.



"I've recently realised how much getting out to shows and bull sales and meeting up with other farmers means to him. The showing side of the cattle is a big part of Niall's and other farmers' social lives - it's the highlight of the farming calendar for a lot of people. The feeling of arriving at a show, unloading your livestock, and seeing all those familiar faces you maybe haven't seen for months is great. You're all in the same boat and there for the same reason, to showcase your livestock, and demonstrate what the agricultural industry has to offer. Show season comes at a time when most people will have just finished lambing or calving, where they have been stressed, worried and very sleep deprived and probably had very little social engagement for a few weeks.

"The showing circle is a great place for catching up with old friends whilst making new ones. You can open up and talk about struggles, whilst also highlighting successes and seeking advice. Arguably, I think the showing circle is one of the best things for your wellbeing as it provides an escape from the everyday worries of farming life and reminds you of the importance of social interaction. There is nothing like having a good blether with someone."

Abby joined Stewartry Young Farmers as soon as she turned 14 and had the honour of being club secretary last year during its 90th anniversary celebrations. She also previously had a role on Dumfries and Galloway District of Young Farmers, is at present on the West Regional committee and is the current West Miss Young Farmer.

To add to all the juggling she does, Abby was also selected onto the RHET Ambassador Programme in the past and is still currently a committee member and thinks it's important for young farmers to think ahead to turning 30 and how they will fill any voids socially once they are out of age.

"Niall and I are getting married next year but I'm continuing with my own young farmers' club and feel it's really important for all people, whatever their ages, to try to keep up with friends," says Abby, who graduated from Edinburgh Napier University with a BA Honours degree in social sciences.

"Becoming a RHET Ambassador or joining your local RHET committee is certainly something worth looking at as the meetings are a wonderful way of meeting new people.

I also think some of the things Farmstrong is doing, like the walks and talks, are a simple and enjoyable way of keeping a few dates in the diary to get off the farm. It can be easy to let just one thing, such as young farmers, take over your life. It makes such sense to follow the Farmstrong way and try to develop new interests as well." Abby did her university dissertation on the mental health of male farmers in Dumfries and Galloway, speaking to a wide age range from 18 to 60.

Despite being a farmer's daughter, it was her dissertation work which made her realise she wanted a job in agriculture and fuelled her passion to be involved in the SAYFC Development and Wellbeing committee. The dissertation highlighted that there was a need within the industry for a wellbeing initiative.

"The work Farmstrong is doing is amazing and I won't be alone in wishing it had been around years ago. I love the idea that following Farmstrong's simple 5 steps to wellbeing can start to make people feel better - whatever their age - straight away," said Abby.



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TRIO & TESTED: Three tried and tested tips from Abby Forsyth for better wellbeing:

- Going for a run. "Some days I'm out and about visiting farms and it's not possible but on other days I'm staring at a screen all day and running is - for me - a brilliant way to think through and process any problems."
- Pick up the 'phone. "I know it's not always possible, but my fiancé would say there is nothing like having a good chat with somebody on the 'phone - or better still, face-to-face."
- Get dates in the diary. "Some of the things Farmstrong is doing, like the walks and talks, are a simple and enjoyable way of putting a few dates in the diary to get off the farm."

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