



June is well known for Fathers' Day and iconic summer events such as Royal Ascot and Glastonbury. For the last 40 years it has also been the month to celebrate Volunteers' Week and to mark this milestone Farmstrong Scotland speaks to people from the rural community who give...

It was the Greek storyteller Aesop who famously said, "No act of kindness, no matter how small, is ever wasted" and his words still ring true today.

To give is one of the five ways to wellbeing which forms the cornerstone of Farmstrong Scotland, a movement which is making huge strides in supporting farmers and crofters to look after themselves better.

'Helping others' was identified as having a positive impact to their wellbeing by 80% of respondents to Farmstrong's initial research, conducted by SRUC in 2022. Interestingly, many people who give their time to others - from helping at the local school to picking up an elderly neighbour's shopping - do not actually see themselves as volunteers.

This is a sentiment that rings true for Sarah Mackie, who believes the farming, crofting and rural communities in general are full of people who "just get on and do what's needed" without any fanfare. A farmer with a huge passion for food and drink after a career in the sector, Sarah has held many high-profile roles such as a director for the Royal Highland Agricultural Society of Scotland (RHASS) where she is involved in 'Scotland's Larder' at the Royal Highland Show. She is the first to point out that it is due to having a great team at home which has allowed her to be involved in a variety of causes both locally and across Scotland over the years.

She also serves as a Deputy Lieutenant of Aberdeenshire and director of The MacRobert Trust. However, she says it is often local efforts which can be as rewarding as larger impact organisations - like producing the local community's publication, Methlick Matters, or helping at the local Agri show - that gives as much pleasure.

"Without realising it most folk can do something which helps others or a community out. It can be fun to be involved and a wee thing can make a difference. It might be giving someone without transport

a lift, baking for a fund raiser, helping with litter pick or whatever. There are so many layers to country life, with farmers and rural folk probably giving more than they realise from anything like using their tractor & kit for hedge cutting to clearing snow, helping a neighbour out, coaching kids sport to taking their turn helping a village club"

Sarah, who is also involved in bringing together food and drink producers for the EQ food pavilion at the Turriff Show, is full of praise of those involved with that particular organisation.

"Whilst they have a secretary and some part time help, it is the number and commitment of the volunteers who make it come together each year which is so impressive. They are all so dedicated and everyone pulls together to create a tremendous show which really punches above its weight. Many get involved from when they were young and continue to help for decades later."

"Volunteering is not about a title after your name or gaining anything from it, it's simply about doing something that helps others and is hopefully good fun and enjoyable at the same time," Sarah continued.



That said at clubs and events you also need folk to be the audience or the visitor so even if volunteering isn't for you, people can still support a cause and be involved that way!

Business Manager David 'Jock' McKenzie describes Black Isle Show as his "happy place." He has been involved for more than 30 years, following in the footsteps of both his father and grandfather in having held the position of president.

"I love the build-up and excitement, everything about the show," explains Jock. "But to be fair, it's doing more for me than I am for it. Being involved makes me feel better, gets rid of any anxieties and it brings back so many happy memories, especially since my father died."

Jock has a busy work life, managing Inverness-shire, Aberdeenshire and the North of Scotland for Yara International.

"We all have those days when we would like to stay in bed, but I find being busy works best for me. Being involved in the show is a motivation, knowing that it can't happen without volunteers."

It has been a joy to Jock and his wife Jenny to see their children William, 13, and Lucy, 11, getting more involved in the show.

"My sister is involved, and my father and grandfather were both past presidents. I think the Farmstrong message that giving something back is good for your own wellbeing is very true."

Agrii Agronomist, David Barclay, is president of Perthshire Agricultural Society and has been involved for the best part of 10 years. At aged 37, he says stepping up to help the show filled the gap left after involvement with the young farmers' club movement. It also helped him meet new people after moving to Perth for work from the family farm in Berwickshire in the Scottish Borders. His job involves a lot of travel, covering Central Scotland and Fife.

"You hear a lot of people my age say 'I'll volunteer when I'm 50' but we cannot be sure that all the country shows and events we all love will still be around then. They need new ideas and enthusiasm now."

David is the first to admit that since starting a family with his wife Anna - their daughter Molly came along a year and-a-half ago - juggling commitments can be a challenge.

"Sometimes, when I'm out at another meeting, I'm sure Anna thinks I'm mad," he says. "But at the end of the day she knows that while some people crave peace and

quiet, I am terrible at it, I like to be busy. Being involved with the show takes my mind off the pressures of work and helps me to feel part of the local community."

Talking of work, in common with Jock, David finds his crop walks with clients often end up involving long chats with farmers.

"With more machinery these days and less staff, people like an agronomist are often one of the few people to regularly visit farms. A lot of farmers and crofters probably feel they can talk to us about things they wouldn't bother their own family with.

"But going back to the show, involvement in it is a wonderful way of getting out - there are regular meetings - and getting to know new people."

Studies by the National Council for Voluntary Organisations have shown that three quarters of volunteers (75%) reported that giving their time to help others improved their own mental health and wellbeing. The NCVO adds every volunteer gets something different from giving their time, from improving self-esteem, confidence and wellbeing to gaining work experience. Developing new skills is another plus, along with meeting new people and feeling a valued member of a team.



Trio & Tested: Three simple things that Sarah, Jock and David have learnt on the path to giving their time

- Farmers and crofters often give more to their local community than they realise.
- Getting involved with something like an agricultural show society can help fill the void left after becoming out of age for organisations such as the young farmers' movement.
- Volunteering can help you meet new people and to feel part of your local community - even if that's just attending a community meeting and being part of a group, it can be helpful in lots of ways.

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