

Farming in Scotland

Siri and Mats, two Norwegians in their early twenties, are studying Agricultural Production Operations at an agricultural college in Norway. As a part of their second year in a Bachelor degree programme, all the students have a month's practice on a farm. Siri and Mats have both been in Scotland before and have chosen to learn more about the farming there. At Edinburgh airport they are met by their host, Frank McFarlane, and are now on their way to Frank's farm in the Fife area, not far from Edinburgh.

Frank: Great to have two young Norwegians here. I have been to Norway once, and shall never forget it!

Siri: Where did you go?

Frank: I went along the west coast, driving from Bergen to Kristiansund. Fascinating scenery, and many places reminded me of home.

Mats: Where are you from, Frank?

Frank: From the island group in western Scotland called the Outer Hebrides. That is a fairly remote area, and agriculture there is on a much smaller scale than in southern Scotland. Sheep and wool are the main sources of income.

Mats: I have heard that a lot of barley is being grown in Scotland, only for the purpose of whisky production. Is that a good way to use the soil resources?

Frank: You know, whisky is a national symbol for Scotland and an important export. We take pride in our fresh water and good quality barley. I don't think that will ever change! Here we are, welcome to our farm!

Siri: Looks enormous. Seems that there is plenty of arable land in this part of Scotland!

Frank: Yes, that's true. In the more mountainous areas, the soil is not as rich as here. To tell you the truth, I have not had this farm for very long. I used to work for a farmer further north, but in 2003 the Scottish Parliament passed a Land Reform Act, making it easier to buy arable land from the big landlords. Let me show you your accommodation, then after you've had a bite to eat, I'll take you on a tour of the farm.

An hour later:

Frank: Tell me exactly what you are interested in, and I'll do my best to give you the information you are looking for.

Siri: Well, the main focus is to expand our knowledge of agriculture in Scotland. Since we had both been here before, we wanted to learn more about this country that in many ways can be compared to Norway, and in other ways is so totally different.

Mats: And we would also like to know something about the challenges you experience in Scottish agriculture.

Frank: Here is the barn, and as you know, we are mainly a dairy and beef farm. By the way, have you heard about BSE?

Both: No....

Frank: Maybe mad cow disease sounds more familiar?

Mats: Sure, that was a tough time for farmers in the UK, wasn't it?

Frank: Yes, it was. 4.4 million cattle were slaughtered in the eradication programme, and the export of British beef was banned in 1996.

Siri: What is mad cow disease actually?

Frank: It is a disease where we see spongy degeneration in the brain and spinal cord of the cattle. It is fairly infectious, and if transferred to human beings, a disease called Creutzfeldt-Jakob may appear.

Mats: Was the Foot and Mouth outbreak later?

Frank: Yes, that was in 2001. You already seem to have some knowledge about the challenges a farmer in the UK may face!

Siri: Are dairy and beef production your main sources of income?

Frank: Yes, but we have some areas of arable land where the soil is particularly rich, and we grow cereals and also have some horticulture - growing raspberries, strawberries and loganberries. I can assure you that after a month as apprentices on this farm you will learn a lot about Scottish agriculture. And my neighbours, who have specialized in poultry and pig livestock, have invited you to come over to find out more about that type of farming.

Siri: Oh, we are so grateful already. Thank you so much!

Frank: I have another surprise for you as well. During the third week of your stay here in Scotland I'm going to see my relatives in the Hebrides. I would like to take you two there.

Mats: Really! Wow! I always wanted to see some of the Scottish islands! What is typical of the Hebrides?

Frank: The Outer Hebrides consist of many islands. In the south we have Barra, and we are going to fly there from Glasgow. The landing there will be spectacular, as we will actually land on the beach. My family comes from an island further north, and are still cultivating the land in the traditional way called crofting. As I mentioned, mutton and wool are the main products in these areas. I'm looking forward to showing you these islands and their traditional way of living. But now it is time for supper!