

IN AT THE DEEP END!

Farmer's wife takes the plunge in support of Farmstrong Scotland by sharing her journey to a new sense of wellbeing

Farmer's wife and grandmother Hazel Moss describes herself as "a private person" but she is stepping out of the shadows to support Farmstrong Scotland.

Like most people farming or crofting Hazel has found herself juggling many plates over the years.

To help bring some extra money into the family's farm on Orkney, Hazel has held down a job away from the 700-acre holding, working for the National Health Service on the governance side.

Hazel's husband Brian and their son Peter run the farm, which has been in the family for more than two centuries. It's all hands to the pumps though, with Hazel helping with the 175 head of suckler cattle that are to calve each year.

Then, although an absolute delight to her, the arrival of grandchildren has been another pull on her time. Interestingly though, it was watching her grandchildren Leo and Xanthe having a swim at the beach that proved to be the key to unlocking a new sense of wellbeing - both mental and physical - for Hazel.

"I was watching them in the sea one day and they were so happy and carefree it

reminded me of being a young girl myself and enjoying a swim," she recalls.

"I set off for home and found a swimming costume and I've never looked back. It was a time when we had a lot of things going on at the farm and with the Covid lockdowns the whole world seemed a very stressful place.

"The feeling of peace that came over me the second I got into the sea was an instant thing. Straight away I was hooked."

The irony of so many farming folk living among breathtaking scenery - that others so often visit in order to relax - is not lost on Hazel.

"A lot of us farmers live in beautiful countryside, but we never take a moment to stop and appreciate it," she says. "Swimming in the clear water and doing something just for me - not for the farm or for anybody else - makes me feel a stronger person. I've learnt not to feel guilty about taking time to do something that makes me feel good. It gives me a bit of time and breathing space to take stock and appreciate life."

Although getting into the sea can be a challenge in itself when the temperature

drops, Hazel hasn't swapped her trusty costume for a wetsuit.

"There is a feeling of strength and achievement that comes from getting into the water when it's cold," says Hazel, who laughs that husband Brian will often jokingly point out she needs to get for a swim if she has missed a few days.

"I try and swim five days a week, the family can tell if I have missed a few days," says Hazel.

"Orkney's a small island but I've met new people and discovered caves and other places I never knew existed."

When Gerard Vaughan and Marc Gascoigne, New Zealanders from the Farmstrong movement, came over to spread the word about the programme they both stayed on the Moss family farm on Orkney and joined Hazel for one of her swims.

"I took them to one of my favourite spots at the Churchill Barriers, which link Orkney with the two smaller islands of Lamb Holm and Glimps Holm," recalls Hazel.

"Farmers are the world's worst people for finding more jobs to do and not looking after themselves. "I am a private person,





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not special or a big achiever. Just a quiet farmer’s wife, but the sense of wellbeing swimming gives me makes me confident enough to urge others to find their special thing - something just for them that makes them feel good.”

Hazel encourages any readers inspired by her story, to do some research first on safe places to swim before taking the plunge.

“I encourage folk to reach out and make contact with wild swimming sites to get help and encouragement on safe places to swim,” says Hazel, who has joined other wild swimmers through a group called Orkney Polar Bears. Interestingly, this outdoor swimming club has been on the go for years, many of its members staying on after their swim to enjoy flasks of hot drinks and a chat.

“Orkney Polar Bears have been my saviour and through them I have had the help and encouragement to keep safe, find new places to swim and have great company to swim with.

“I wish Farmstrong all the very best and if a grandmother in her swimming costume helps encourage just one person to take some time for themselves then it will have been worth it.”



Three simple steps that helped set Hazel Moss on the path to better wellbeing

- Take inspiration from others. It was watching her grandchildren swimming in the sea, so happy and carefree, that inspired Hazel to take the plunge.
- Be aware of the irony of so many farming folk living among breathtaking scenery but never taking a moment to notice it.
- Learn not to feel guilty about taking time to do something that makes you feel good.

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