



Almost a million pounds was raised on Doddie's Grand Tour 2025, an 800-mile charity cycle which involved dozens of teams tackling the Dublin to Edinburgh route to raise money for research into motor neurone disease (MND) in the name of his late former rugby teammate - and fellow farmer - Doddie Weir.

Rob revealed to The Scottish Farmer that his bike has been parked up at his farm on the remote Isle of Coll ever since he returned home. "Well, as all farmers know, there is always a job to be on with," smiles 60-year-old former flanker Rob.

Rob who has featured on the Farmstrong podcast Blether Together, held down a demanding career as an army doctor before swapping his stethoscope for a pitchfork. Known for his tartan-clad cycle rides, he took the plunge and bought a run-down farm in the 90s after his rugby career as a Scotland international came to an end.

"I'm pleased to support Farmstrong and admire the way its promotion of wellbeing takes any stigma away from talking about mental health," says Rob.

"I know how isolating it can be out there on farms, particularly if the finances are difficult or if the livestock or crops are struggling. Pressure piles up but everyone should remember that the best way to unload is to talk to your neighbours and friends

- remember they are all struggling with the same problems as well. Other people's lives may look wonderful, but they either will have gone through - or currently be experiencing - all the same difficulties."

Rob himself admits he would normally rather be stood at the ringside of an auction mart, putting the world to rights with another farmer, than being interviewed. Even though, with his 37 caps for Scotland, he has had plenty of practice in front of the microphone.

It was back in 1999, when Rob and his wife Romaine took their four children (the youngest was only ten days old) to live in a caravan while they renovated the ruined farm on the Inner Hebrides island.

"I had grown up in rural Perthshire and did holiday jobs on a farm when I was a teenager; farming was all around us back then," recalls Rob. "We didn't always have the dream of becoming farmers, but the opportunity presented itself and I look back now and think how lucky we were to be able to buy the farm."

It is a great joy to Rob and Romaine that all their children have settled on the island.

"I like that Farmstrong gets its message across to all ages," he says.

"I especially feel for the young people who have grown up in these remote rural communities trying to set out in life these days," reflects Rob. "When we bought the farm, housing was extremely cheap, and this was quite an untouristy island. I bet if you were well up on these things, house prices up here have risen as high a percentage as anywhere in Scotland."

26-year-old son Alex is increasingly working alongside his father on the farm, with Dougie, Hebridean artist Natasha and Cammy all mucking in as and when needed.

While the farm runs to around 4,500 acres, a fair chunk is boggy moorland. On the better land Rob runs between 80 and 100 Luing suckler cows, crossing with either a Simmental - to create the Sim-Luing - or with a Charolais bull. In addition, there are over 400 breeding ewes, mostly made up Lleyn breeding.

While he likes traditional livestock and farming, Rob enjoys finding out about the latest agri technology. Last spring he invested in a Monil virtual fencing system, which uses GPS and solar-powered collars to create invisible boundaries.

"I have six or seven mobs of cattle grazing and I can pick up the phone and have a look to see how the grass is looking," he says.



"Or at feed times or for calving, it saves me wandering around looking for them - one look and I know where they are, it saves so much time.

"It's also been a gamechanger when it comes to controlling bracken growth, a lot less good pasture is being lost to it. Of course, it's a big investment but nothing compared to the cost of fencing such a vast area.

"Keeping an enquiring mind and looking at new ideas and wanting to find out about them is for me one of the great joys of farming, to be constantly learning. Maybe it's more so for me as I came to it late, I was 34 when I started farming," Rob often reflects on Farmstrong's Five Ways to Wellbeing, which are Connect, Be Active, Take Notice, Keep Learning, and Give.

"The two that feature most prominently for me are connecting - the social side of life and giving of yourself - and being active, looking after the physical side of health.

"Farming's an active job, your body has to work - mine carries the scars of rugby - so I have to work hard to keep it going and a by-product is that it makes me feel good, I get a feeling of wellbeing from taking exercise.

"With a small community like Coll there's lots of empty spaces, but you are never really alone and that sense of being among friends, with a population of just 150 or so,

means we all come together to socialise and celebrate. My family and friends are definitely the backbone of my own personal wellbeing.

"I probably come across as super chilled, but that isn't always the case, such as in the weeks before the cycle races when I'm spinning a lot of plates.

"Life has been very kind to me but, just like everybody else, it does all pile up occasionally.

"When the ferry sails by in bad weather and you have got all the commitments of the farm it can be deeply depressing but the community that we have helps with this; I often think people are far more isolated in big cities."

Rob describes starting up the farm as both a "big challenge and steep learning curve" and admits to low points when things went wrong with the livestock, having to learn and cope living on an island without a vet.

"That first year we lost a lot of stock, it was a painful learning process," he says.

"I know how isolated it can be out on farms and crofts and the message which Farmstrong is spreading so well is not to suffer in silence, to reach out and talk about it - you'll feel that weight lift off your shoulders immediately.

I have found farmers to be very generous with both their time and their advice and my three top tips would be connect, connect and connect."

"I've learnt through my dealings with people with MND that their choice is removed to do the things they want to do," says Rob. "Health is such a blessing, if you can do things do them. Connect with others, be physically as active as you can - and make the most of every day."

This was the sixth year in a row that Rob has taken on a major endurance challenge in support of the My Name's Doddie Foundation, which Weir established following his MND diagnosis in 2016.

He was joined on the 800-mile journey between the two capitals by former Ireland and British and Irish Lions centre Gordon D'Arcy, Scotland rugby legend Scott Hastings, broadcaster and Deacon Blue drummer Dougie Vipond and record-breaking cyclist Mark Beaumont.

This year's cycle challenge also marked the final part of Doddie Aid, the mass participation exercise event founded by Wainwright in 2021 that has raised more than £5 million for MND research.

For further information visit www.mynamesdoddie.co.uk



CONNECT

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TRIO & TESTED: Three ways Rob Wainwright looks after his wellbeing

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- Family and friends are definitely the backbone of my own personal wellbeing – my very top tip is connect, connect and connect'

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