

Udderly Amazing:

Tracey no longer carries the weight of the world on her shoulders

Being active is one of the Five Steps to Wellbeing that form the cornerstones of Farmstrong Scotland. We meet a dairy industry stalwart who has lifted her way to a glass (of milk, of course) half full outlook on life...

Tracey Roan is in many ways a modern multi-tasking farmer. By day she holds down a demanding job as NFU Scotland Dairy Policy Manager, coming home at night to feed both her calves and her family.

It is her hobby of weightlifting that sets Tracey apart; something she discovered she had a talent for completely by accident when she ventured - full of trepidation - down to the local gym.

"I hated PE at school and have never liked sport," recalls Tracey, who many will remember from when her family's Roan's Dairy in Dumfries and Galloway featured on This Farming Life. The television series charted the ups and downs of farming life for Tracey and her husband Steven, brother-in-law Stuart and his wife Aylett along with both couples' then young children.

"I was turning 40, had put on a bit of weight and felt sluggish. Diagnosed with an underactive thyroid and - with some health issues in the family such as diabetes and high blood pressure - I decided to try the gym to shift a bit of mum tum."

As well as the usual running machine and exercise bike, staff at the gym introduced Tracey to weights, explaining that working on strength is good for female bone health, helping in the fight against conditions in later life such as osteoporosis.

"It was really quite funny - and I put it down to a lifetime carrying buckets of milk, chucking tyres on the silage pit and so-on - but I naturally found the weights easy," recalls Tracey.

"I just expected to be doing half an hour of traditional aerobic exercise but have inadvertently found something I love doing among a really friendly and supportive community I would never have met in my normal life.

"It's also a bonus that when I look around the gym, or at weightlifting competitions, everybody is drinking milk and eating protein yoghurts. The fitness community are definitely supporters of the dairy industry!"

That first visit to the gym was back in the autumn of 2022 and Tracey, who is now 42 and mother to Andrew, 15, and 13 year-old Lucy, remembers turning up wearing an old t-shirt for her first weightlifting competition.

"There were all these cool outfits, but everybody was really friendly and I came third in this first strong woman competition, with the deadlifting - using the legs - my strongest event, lifting 135kg for 11 reps in 60 seconds," recalls Tracey.

"I'm never going to be Scotland's strongest woman, but I enjoy going to competitions as it gives me a goal to train for. I still go down to the gym at least twice a week, it helps clear my head and I feel so much better for it."

Tracey heard New Zealand farmer Marc Gascoigne speak about Farmstrong at the NFU Scotland Conference last year and "totally related" to all that he was saying.

"Dairy farming is a seven-day-a-week way of life and with calving all year round it's difficult to take any time off," says Tracey.





“The Farmstrong message that to farm well you need to live well is absolutely true. Even now, I still feel guilty for taking some time away, but the difference is I now realise you cannot be productive if you aren’t looking after yourself.”

Not only does Tracey have plenty on her plate at home on the farm, but her job which also includes responsibility for the Government-funded Scottish Dairy Hub, a signposting service for the dairy sector, can leave her “living and breathing farming and all its problems.”

“Going to the gym definitely helps clear my head,” explains Tracey. “I love my job, but before the weightlifting I was feeling drained and unmotivated. The thing is, it’s so hard not to get emotionally involved as I typically speak to other farmers when they are having a tough time.

“Clearing my head through exercising has helped me realise that I can’t wave a magic wand - I wish I could - when it comes to big issues like milk prices.

“Lifting the weights and taking some time

out - away from the farm and away from work - helps me think things through much clearer, which has to be a good thing for everybody.”

Another area that Tracey feels has helped her overall wellbeing is the body positivity aspect of weightlifting.

“I was the chubby kid at school whose PE report always said, ‘could do better’ and it’s taken me 40 years to realise that there is no such thing as a perfect body,” explains Tracey.

“My aim when I first went to the gym was to lose a bit of weight and feel fitter, not so out of breath, when doing jobs on the farm. Looking back, I have got so much more out of it than that. The gym and the weightlifting world are full of people of all different shapes and sizes; it has shown me you certainly don’t have to be thin to be fit and healthy.

“Especially with social media, it’s so easy to always be comparing ourselves to others and I have learnt you shouldn’t judge others - or more importantly yourself - on looks.

“I definitely plan to take my children down to the gym, so they can learn that body

positivity and the importance of looking after themselves. I also think it’s very healthy when you live on a farm - or any rural place - to push yourself out of your comfort zone and meet people who are from a different walk of life to those you normally mix with.”

Tracey’s three favourite events are deadlifting using her legs, with a personal best of 180kg and aiming to lift 200kg this year, and the appropriately named Farmers’ Walk, carrying around 75kilos in each hand for a distance of 40 metres.

“It must have something to do with all the buckets of cattle cake I’ve carried over the years,” smiles Tracey, whose other speciality event is yoke carrying - a weight of around 150 kilos carried across her shoulders.

And what does Steven, who milks 240 pedigree Holstein cows just outside Dalbeattie, make of his wife’s weightlifting?

“Just the other day they had a cow that was struggling to get up, Steven proudly told everybody ‘Not to worry, Tracey will be able to help her’...”

Trio & Tested: Three simple steps that helped set Tracey Roan on the path to better wellbeing

- There is no such thing as the perfect body; stop comparing yourself to others. “If you spend your life trying to be everybody’s cup of tea, you’ll just end up being a mug,” says Tracey.
- Taking some time for yourself isn’t selfish; to be productive you have to look after yourself.
- Meeting people from outside your usual friendship and family circles is good, widening your outlook and understanding of other people’s lives.



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