

Mastering their field: RSPCA Assured shines spotlight on female farmers

Only 16% of farm managers are female in the UK - but RSPCA Assured bucks trend as 77% of farming assessors are women

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This International Women's Day (8 March), RSPCA Assured is shining a spotlight on female farmers and scientists who are making great strides for equality and improving animal welfare.

According to the Office for National Statistics, women make up around 55% of the farming workforce in England and Wales (including unpaid and family labour) but only around 16% are officially 'farm holders' or managers.

Historically, the industry has been seen as a male-dominated sector, however, RSPCA Assured - the RSPCA's ethical food label and farm assurance scheme - highlights how these farmers are leading the way to change that.

Jude - turkey farmer

Jude Robinson is a fourth-generation turkey farmer based in Northamptonshire. She is part of a growing number of female farmers and says she was lucky enough to take over from her father who she thinks was ahead of his time with his environmental concerns and progressive ideas; a concern of which she shares.

Her advice for women getting into farming would be the same for any young person.

She said: "It's important to build your own relationships, be yourself and don't be



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afraid to ask questions. Trust your own instincts and judgement. If something doesn't feel right, then don't do it.

“Being a woman in farming these days can also mean a lot of different things. There are many different career paths to choose from and it doesn't always mean just sitting on a tractor. There may be men that are stronger and bigger but that doesn't mean you don't have a really great role to play, play to your strengths and you'll find a role that you really enjoy.”

As an RSPCA Assured farmer, animal welfare has been a critical part of her role.

She added: “For me, it has been important to develop things in a way that suits me and my ethics and having turkeys raised here to higher welfare standards just feels like the right thing to do.”

Joanna - dairy farmer

Joanna Binnington manages a dairy farm in West Sussex but her life before this was very different. She previously worked in London as a buyer for a high-end glassware retailer. Then, she married her husband Tim and made the move into farming in 1981.

She said: “I'd always enjoyed working with animals and the chance to get involved with the family farm was too good an opportunity to miss. And I have a special passion for cows.”

Within two years, Joanna had taken over running the farm.

“At that time, we had a herd of 120 pedigree Holsteins, black and white dairy cows that are such an iconic part of our countryside. I love every part of working with them - walking through the herd and hearing them cuddling quietly, the breeding and rearing of calves, letting the cows out to pasture in the spring and bringing them back inside before the start of winter.”



The herd has now expanded to 250 milking cows with 80 yearling heifers and 80 heifer calves. The farm is proud to be suppliers of milk for M&S and are working with RSPCA

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Assured to ensure the highest welfare standards for all the stock. When Joanna first came into dairy farming, there were very few women working in the industry and she describes herself as having been “a bit of a novelty.”

“I had to learn absolutely everything from scratch. But there are advantages to coming from a non-farming background. You aren’t afraid to question everything and be open to new ideas and innovations.” However, nowadays, Joanna explains that women are taking major roles in dairying both on farm and right through the supply chain which is wonderful to see.

Lizzy - pig farmer

Lizzy Murrell is an inspiring young farmer in Norfolk who took over her own pig unit when she was aged just 19. Now, after an incredibly successful few years single-handedly running her own 2,000 pig unit, rearing them to the highest welfare standards and achieving great results, she is currently expecting her ninth batch.

She said: “As a young, female farmer, I’ve never felt at all uncomfortable being a woman in farming and I think I’m treated exactly the same as the men. I can honestly say I’ve never had any negative experiences. I guess a part of that is that I’ve had a strong female farming role model in the family as my aunt ran her own unit before she had children. For me, there has never been a distinction between female or male farming and I’m incredibly proud of that.”

Kate - poultry scientist

Poultry welfare expert Kate Norman works in the farm animals team at the RSPCA and helps to create the higher welfare standards which the RSPCA Assured scheme follows.

Kate started her career as a Research Associate at The University of Bristol and the Royal Veterinary College London. Her research was focused specifically on laying hens, investigating practical changes that could be made on-farm to improve behavioural opportunities and welfare.

Despite women making up just 24% of STEM roles in the UK workforce, as a female scientist working for the animal



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welfare charity, Kate has found a very different picture there.

“Women hugely outnumber men in my department and not just in our farm animals team but across the RSPCA we have a number of women in leadership roles, and 68% of our RSPCA inspectors are female. And in RSPCA Assured, 77% of all assessors going on farms are women, so I guess we are all bucking the trend,” Kate said.

Her research and advice means RSPCA Assured certified hens live much better lives and this also sets a benchmark for all laying hen farmers not just here in the UK but around the world.

She said: “I’ve been surrounded by farming my whole life. We always kept chickens and reared the occasional lamb and calf. Growing up, I lived next door to a large free-range chicken unit - so I opened my curtains in the morning to chickens, chickens, chickens so it was inevitable that I would one day want to work at improving their lives.”

For more information on female RSPCA Assured farmers visit: xxxx

For more detail on International Women’s Day, see www.internationalwomensday.com

Ends

Notes to editors

Images can be downloaded here: xxx

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