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**Press Release**

**[31 October 2023]**

**Road to Ritchies: Prominent figure in Scottish agriculture named as Farmstrong Scotland Programme Director**

A wellbeing initiative for Scottish farmers and crofters has taken a big step forward with the appointment of a key team member.

Alix Ritchie, a Perthshire farmer and passionate advocate for the rural community, has been named as the inaugural Programme Director for Farmstrong Scotland.

“I’m so excited to have been given the opportunity to bring this amazing programme to the farmers and crofters of Scotland,” said Alix, who moves to head up Farmstrong Scotland from her current role as Health and Education Manager for Quality Meat Scotland (QMS).

“Although I will be sorry to leave the role I’ve loved with QMS, it feels very much the right decision; especially as I’ve followed the Farmstrong movement in Scotland as a supporter since the very beginning.

“I think personal resilience and wellbeing is something we neglect as an industry as we don’t place enough value on ourselves. We spend so much time servicing and maintaining our machinery, checking the health and welfare of our animals and thinking about the wellbeing of our business but often neglect our greatest asset - ourselves.

“Farmstrong Scotland will enable the rural community to learn how to improve their own wellbeing which - in turn - will help them to farm and croft better. Learning how to build up resilience for when times are tough is a key element of Farmstrong Scotland; making sure farmers and crofters have some coping strategies in their wellbeing account to draw on.”

Mother-of-two Alix, 40, who farms 100-head of suckler cows and 550 ewes at Montalt Farm, Dunning in Perthshire with her husband John and father-in-law George, said one of her first objectives will be to make Farmstrong Scotland a household name among the farming fraternity.

“Farmstrong Scotland isn’t for when somebody is at crisis point; for that level of need there are other excellent charities that have all the expertise to help,” explained Alix.

“Wide research, including Farmstrong Scotland’s own survey with hundreds of farmers and crofters, has shown that what there is a need for is training and support for farmers and crofters to better understand how they can manage their own wellbeing.

“On a personal note, I have learnt that getting out for a walk and my volunteering work on the Women in Agriculture Scotland committee help my own wellbeing. For others it might be something as simple as making time to have a bit of a chat or something more structured. Farmstrong Scotland isn’t here to preach a right way or a wrong way - its aim is to help farmers and crofters find a lifelong path of looking after themselves.”

The Farmstrong movement is the brainchild of New Zealand Programme Director, Gerard Vaughan whose ethos of helping farmers and crofters to “live well, to farm well” has struck a chord with rural communities the length and breadth of the country.

The decision to launch in Scotland, follows on from a visit by New Zealand farmer Doug Avery, who drew huge audiences when he toured Scotland back in 2018 to talk about his own challenges with mental health and wellbeing.

After the tour beef, sheep and arable farmer John Scott, of Ross-Shire, launched, and now Chairs, the Farmstrong Scotland board to find out whether the formula could be adapted to help Scottish farmers and crofters.

“I’m delighted to announce the appointment of Alix as the person who will help us continue to drive momentum for Farmstrong Scotland,” said Mr Scott.

“Her understanding and passion for farming and crofting in Scotland is second to none - she really is the perfect person to spread the Farmstrong Scotland message.

“We all know that agriculture is facing unimaginable changes that will impact generations and could require complete restructuring of farming practices. Many of these challenges we can’t control - they will happen regardless of how well we rear our livestock, grow our crops or manage our finances. It’s vital that during this period of immense change we learn to look after ourselves and Alix is the person who is going to help set us all on the right path.”

Alix will take up the role of Programme Director for Farmstrong Scotland on November 20th, 2023.

**-Ends-**

**For more information or to arrange an interview, contact Rebecca Dawes on 07792 467730 or email comms@farmstrongscotland.org.uk**

**Notes to editors:**

**Farmstrong Scotland is supported by RHASS, the Movember Foundation and NFU Mutual, who supported the launch of the organisation.**

**Movember Foundation are matching every £1 raised by Farmstrong Scotland, to the sum of £350,000. Anyone wishing to donate or find out more about supporting the charity, can get in touch via** **hello@farmstrongscotland.org.uk**

**A core principle of Farmstrong Scotland is its five ways to wellbeing. These are:**

 • Connect - developing new friendships and spending time with friends. Prioritising time away from work.

• Give - Giving your time to others, be that through supporting those having a tough time or spending quality time with family.

• Take notice - Take time to pause and think about what you appreciate. Find the simple things that make you happy and pay attention to them, if only for a few moments.

• Keep learning - Be curious on and off the farm. Learning new things is good for your brain, will keep your mind active and help you farm smarter.

• Be active - Working up a sweat releases endorphins that make you feel alert and better able to cope with challenges. Make physical activity a habit, aim for at least 30 minutes of movement a day.