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**Press Release**

[Tuesday 23 April 2024]

**Tuning in to rural wellbeing**

**Favourite television presenter announced as host of a new podcast series for Farmstrong Scotland**

Most people know Sarah Stephen from her work as a television presenter.

Not everyone will be aware that Sarah - who many still refer to by her maiden name Sarah Mack – runs a successful diversified farming business along with her husband David in Aberdeenshire.

The team behind the wellbeing movement for farmers and crofters, Farmstrong Scotland, were delighted when Sarah agreed to host its exciting new podcast series *Blether Together*.

“Working on the BBC’s rural affairs programme Landward gave me a huge insight into rural life, the best part was the interesting people and the huge diversity of businesses that I met along the way. This podcast is going to feature a wide range of contributors who are challenged daily with the ups and downs of making a living in rural Scotland. My aim is to create an environment where our contributors will feel comfortable enough to honestly share their stories.

Although I'm not born and bred into farming - and if you ask me technicalities of cattle and sheep, I might look a wee bit perplexed – David and I have worked hard to develop our farming business in its entirety and I am delighted to be able to support Farmstrong Scotland with this new venture,” said Sarah.

Podcasting continues to skyrocket in popularity, with people liking the flexibility of listening to the recordings at a time to suit themselves rather than being tied to catching a radio broadcast. *Blether Together* is being backed by the NFU Mutual Charitable Trust, along with continued support from Farmstrong Scotland’s founding funders Movember and the Royal Highland Agricultural Society of Scotland. NFU Scotland are also supporting the 2024 series as media partners, sharing the episodes with their network to help reach as many people as possible.

“For *Blether Together* I will be chatting to farmers and crofters across Scotland to learn more about them, their businesses, challenges and the positive steps they take to manage their wellbeing,” explains Sarah.

In the first episode, Sarah meets up with fourth-generation farmer John Scott, who farms in Easter Ross in the Highlands, with his wife Fiona and their four children. The family’s mixed enterprise includes 3,500 breeding ewes, 250 beef cattle, renewables, malted barley, meat boxes and holiday cottages.

“Many will know John as the chairman of Farmstrong Scotland but what we delve into in the podcast is why he is personally so passionate to get the movement set up,” reveals Sarah. “Because of the relaxed, intimate style of these podcast chats, this first blether ends up being a very honest discussion about the ups and downs of John’s farming life.”

Although she thankfully ended up with a very happy childhood, Glasgow-born Sarah didn’t know her father, William Watson, who was killed by the IRA while serving with the Argyll & Sutherland Highlanders in Northern Ireland in the 1970s. She didn’t learn until later in life that her paternal grandfather had a farm in Perthshire.

It was while working at Grampian TV that Sarah met David Stephen, who grew up on a dairy farm near Inverurie. The pair made their home in Oldmeldrum and went on to have four sons. The cattle and sheep farm also grows soft fruit, but it was following an inspiring trip to visit farming friends in New Zealand that Sarah & David instigated further farm diversifications, including a Farmshop, wedding venue and luxury lodges to maximise the opportunities at the historic Barra Castle site.

“As a young girl growing up in Glasgow, I never imagined that I would end up married to a farmer,” said Sarah. “But I have found the farming and crofting communities to be very welcoming and I’m very proud to be able to support them through this Farmstrong Scotland podcast. I hope people will enjoy listening to it as much as I am recording it.”

Alix Ritchie, Programme Director for Farmstrong Scotland, said it was a “pinch me moment” to think that within such a short space of time - less than a year from its launch - that the movement was launching its very own podcast.

“I can’t thank Sarah and our supporters enough for helping to make this exciting new podcast series happen,” said Alix.

“Right at the very heart of Farmstrong Scotland is the notion that to be able to farm and croft well you need to look after yourself, making this podcast a perfect fit. Take a little time for yourself and join us as we *Blether Together…*”

Podcasts will be released monthly, with each one lasting no longer than 30 minutes. They are available on all the usual channels, and can also be downloaded by visiting the Farmstrong Scotland website at [www.farmstrongscotland.org.uk](http://www.farmstrongscotland.org.uk)

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**Notes to Editor**

Farmstrong Scotland is an initiative to help farmers, crofters and their families to cope with the ups and downs of farming and crofting by sharing things they can do to look after themselves and the people in their business. It is a peer-to-peer led programme, driven by scientific information and real-life stories, so together we can share, learn and support our wellbeing.

The organisation is supported by RHASS, the Movember Foundation and NFU Mutual Charitable Trust, who supported the launch of the organisation.

Blether Together, the podcast series in 2024, has been funded by NFU Mutual Charitable Trust, and supported by NFU Scotland as media partners.

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

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