

Emma Trueman

Emma bought Roundhill Farm high up on Morridge near Flash in 2010. With the help of her brother, she farms 45 acres at 1,500 feet at Morridge and another 45 acres at Thorncliffe. She also has two jobs in Leek. Sheila Hine spoke with her in November 2017 about her farming activities at this high altitude.

Part One. Life as a young cattle farmer

SH: Emma, it's a very cold afternoon in late November, the temperature was 2.5 degrees as I turned in and there's snow on the ground. This is Roundhill Farm near Flash. How high up are we Emma and how big is your farm?

ET. Roughly seventeen and a half, eighteen hundred feet above sea level. The grass here, we've got 45 acres and then I farm another 45 acres which we rent down at Thorncliffe.

SH. This is your farm that you bought?

ET. Yes, I bought this about 7 or 8 years ago now.

SH. But there's no house; it's just land and buildings?

ET. At the moment its land and buildings, a house is work in progress.

SH. At the moment its sleeting down. The climate is pretty tough up here?

ET. Yeh, it's not like lowland as in Leek, its completely different. Yesterday there was two to three inches of snow in the morning and then it just continued to snow, wind and sleety rain.

SH. But luckily today you've got the stock in, so you weren't working out in it too much. Do you come up from Leek every day?

ET. Yeh, twice a day I come up, morning and night, and then if somethings for calving I probably come more than that, every few hours.

SH. And you've got other work as well. What else do you do?

ET. I work at the local vets and also at the cattle market, Leek Auctions.

SH: How many days do you do at the vets?

ET: So that ranges. When it's busy I probably do four or five with weekends and then the rest of the time I'm either at the market or here.

SH. How do you fit it all in, you must be shattered sometimes?

ET. I don't know, just keep goin'. I just enjoy it, I enjoy being up here, I enjoy being out.

SH. I suppose you're young yet. What do you try and do up here now? How many animals and what sort?

ET. There's thirty Beef Shorthorns. I try to breed heifers and bulls for the commercial men. One of the cows that I have got, one of her sons went to Stirling last month in the bull sale and topped the market, the Shorthorn sale, at twelve thousand guineas.

SH. You had twelve thousand guineas for a bull?

ET. No, somebody bought him off me as an embryo calf and he took him up, but it's good for the cow and my breeding.

SH. You've shown some haven't you?

ET. Yeh, shown for quite a few years really. Last year we ventured a bit further out; went to the Three Counties, Great Yorkshire and then the local shows. This year we've just stayed local, because I've put a couple of cows on a flushing programme as a bit of security.

SH. Have you been successful with your showing?

ET. Yeah, very well. Touch wood it continues. Got one cow, last year she won some interbreed championship against other breeds. The first cow I took to Great Yorkshire show, she was first in a class of fourteen. And that's a big show.

SH. Up here in the South West Peak you're in very exposed conditions; do you think this is the right thing for you to be doing to make money?

ET. Now I'm into a native hardier breed I hope it's possible. Before, I used to have some continental Limmy, pedigree Belgian Blues and it was no good up here for them at all, whereas these are a lot hardier.

SH. They look a picture, they really look super. You've got some nice silage you're feeding to them; is that made up here?

ET. Yeh, this is actually last years silage we're still using; we silaged in October this year.

SH. It's been a tough late summer and backend this year with so much rain. Have you got any wildlife on the farm or is it just commercial?

ET. We've got in the rushes, there's a bit of a pond in the other field. We've got some black grouse. I've seen a couple of them. Not so many birds now. It's very exposed up here. We used to get a few say March, April time. We get waders, curlews and stuff.

SH. So are you getting any environmental stewardship payments?

ET. Not anymore; we came out of that. It wasn't working to what I wanted to do. It was with Natural England. At the time we had about 100 ewes and it was weather like this and I gave them some hay in the field and they penalised me for it, so that was that.

SH. Is it something you would consider in the future?

ET. I would consider it again, definitely. I'd like to try to increase the wild flowers, because I like to see them. We have got one field that we used to shake hay in but we haven't made hay here for five years because the weathers just not working with us at all. There's still some wild flowers in the back field. It's just whether to try and improve that, I think.

SH. Could you plant any trees or hedges or is it too exposed?

ET. We've tried trees, but they don't grow. Hedges, no, no. We've started rebuilding some stone walls, so hopefully we'll continue to do a bit of that every year.

SH. Do you have any help on the farm?

ET. My brother. My brother helps all the time, or when he can, because he works full time as well; he's a real help. I'm quite lucky really, the cattle are pretty quiet, you can work with them. My brother helps clean out, silaging and general things.

SH. What are your long-term aspirations, your ambitions?

ET. I'd like to breed a bull or a heifer, a bull in particular and take it up to Stirling, but that's in a four-year area so it would get complicated, so it probably won't happen. I'd like to breed a champion in a sale at some point, that's my next goal.

SH. You were saying your house is a work in progress. Would you like to build a house up here?

ET. Yeah, one day when I've adjusted to the weather.

SH. Would you like to carry on up here or would you like to farm in a kinder area?

ET. When I bought it, it was somewhere to get me started and then hopefully I could buy something a little bit bigger, but I don't know if that will happen or not. It's quite a tough world, isn't it?

SH. Yeh, you've done well to get this far compared to a lot of people your age. How old are you?

ET. Twenty-nine. I've been lucky; not many people would want to come and farm up here, so I think that probably gave me a bit of an advantage as it was a bit cheaper. I just thought it was better to buy somewhere than to plough all your money into renting and at the end of the day you haven't that security to know if you've got it from one year to the next.

SH. Going back to the bad weather; how do you cope with it if it's very bad?

ET. We had it bad a few years ago; the snow was as high as the gates. We managed to park in a layby and walk, which isn't ideal but we got here. We also shut the doors; if there's enough stock in, it will keep the water free and not freeze and if we have to, there is a caravan where we could stay the night, just about, if we needed to. We're lucky we've not had to use it yet.

SH. That's the bad side, what's it like in summer when it's nice, that brief window.

ET. That brief window, you still need your jumper. You walk up your top field and you can see for miles. You can see down into Liverpool Docks from the top, it's a really nice view. but there's always a breeze. You can hear the birds lower down, but up here it's pretty quiet.