

Sally Belfield

Sally lives with her brother, James, and her parents, Rob and Ruth Belfield, on Hurdlow Farm. Her life, from a very young age has revolved around farming and farm animals. She works full-time for the estate agent and agricultural surveyor Graham Watkins and Co in Leek. At just twenty-two she has worked there for eight years and spends evenings and weekends helping out at home on the farm. Sheila Hine interviewed Sally in November 2017.

SH. Sally, you live at Hurdlow Farm, would you like to say how old you are and what you do?

SB. So, I am 22 years old and I work full time for Graham Watkins and Co in Leek, which is an estate agents and agricultural surveyors. I also work at Leek market as well at all the auctions that they do. Also, in my spare time, evenings and weekends, I'm helping at home on the farm.

SH. What sort of things do you do at work?

SB. I basically support Graham and Rob Watkins in their valuations and stuff. I do a lot of the background work, like finding comparables, doing all the plans, working out the area of farms and also on the side I do a bit of planning applications, like agricultural justifications for conversion of barns or sheds into farm buildings, I do a background for that. And also, I do help a lot with the farm dispersal sales and machinery sales.

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SH. So your farming background comes in very handy when working with clients.

SB. Yes, to be fair I've always been agriculturally minded; they do seem to get on with me better because I know what I'm taking about like machinery and livestock. They get a good sense of what you do and they take to you, which is a good help.

SH. What sort of things do you do at the market?

SB. Generally, I can do anything. I started when I was 14; I've been there 7 years last August. I've done everything from sheep sales—I started droving sheep then worked at poultry sales, clerking, booking in outside then I got into the office more—all the paperwork, the movement licenses. I'm in charge of the pig movements; make sure they all go through properly and are all correct, check them off. Any problems farmers have with movements, ear tags, holding numbers, changes of cattle ear tags or details if some have got the wrong passport—I deal with those. I've always been a fan of livestock markets, always gone with my dad to Leek, Newark, Market Drayton and Bakewell. It's always been a big interest to me; I do love my job down there.

SH. A lot of the paperwork and regulations you've grown up with, so if you were to continue in farming it would be easy for you because you're used to it.

SB. Yeah, I have a really good understanding of what goes on like all your eartags. I'm always giving people advice on what to do and your sheep, I know what tags they need and what movements they need. It's a big help with the Red market now on a Thursday which enables farmers who are shut down with a TB breakdown to sell cattle for slaughter. They all have to have this TB24 license and a lot of farmers don't understand what one of those is. They don't know what to do to be able to sell stock, so I can give advice which is a good help.

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SB. On the sheep side, when I started down at Leek Auctions, EID wasn't a problem and from then it developed and we had to make sure that everything is electronically tagged. Your ear tags are a big issue now, so say someone comes along to a lamb sale and purchases 400 lambs, they might only have 398 ear tags and it's like you've got to go round again and make sure you find which ones are missing, and make sure everything is spot on.

SH. Does the machinery break down?

SB. Yeh, it does. Like some of the sticks sometimes don't read properly or they're a bit steady and then I've kinda developed it so I know all the different connections between the actual market system, which is Newline, to people working outside. So, if they ever have a problem with it, its "Fetch Sally" "Sally can sort this?"

SH. Do you think it's worth it, worth all the trouble?

SB. These EID tags? In general, it's very good for tracing animals, especially in the market now. So, say down Leek market, we're not the best with all the hurdles and gates everywhere. It's a good setup when it works, but say at night, it can be pitch black darkness outside with the pens of lambs and you've got a lamb jumped into another pen. You know what tag you've got missing, and you can go and scan that lamb and right that lamb belongs to that person and you can pull it out. In the old days, I can imagine if you were at a sale and that happened you wouldn't know where it had got to; it would be just among the rest.

SH. But if we go back like 20 odd years, sheep weren't tagged. We all survived. So, you think it's a good thing?

SB. I do, I believe in the EID tags. As long as everyone sticks to the rules and does it right, then yeh, definitely. But there is always those ones who go to market and say sell a pen of ewe lambs for breeding and they've all got slaughter tags in, so you have to tell the buyer when they get back they will need to record those eartags and replace them with double ear tags. That bit is a bit of a nightmare, but for tracing it's very good.

SH. You've done a lot with Young Farmers Sally. What sort of stuff have you done that you've really enjoyed with them?

SB. To be fair, Waterhouses YFC is a big part of my life; I've been there since I was 12. I joined in 2007. I've done every competition; I've been chairman. I was chairman last year, which I really enjoyed. Also, I was treasurer for 4 years, winning best

treasurer in the county twice, which is a big achievement for me, really. I've also done a lot of stock judgings and public speaking competitions, rally, that sort of thing. It's always been a big part of my life; I could probably count on one hand how many times I've missed a meeting in the last few years.

SH. You've learned a lot from it as well as the public stuff, and other stuff?

SB. Yeh, it's been really good, the network from Young Farmers is amazing. Like I say, it's all over the Country and it gives anyone from any place the opportunity to have a go. It can help you get into farming. It's not just farming, I've done flower arranging and I got the opportunity to go to the Oxford Farming Conference for 2 days and that was amazing. It's held in the Oxford University. This was 2 years ago in the January before the EU referendum. The actual guy from the European Union was there, the Defra secretary, Liz Truss and Kerry McCarthy the vegan and top people from big companies like McDonalds and the Co-op; all your managers were all there. We sat down one night in one of the big examination halls and had this magnificent 5 course meal. You could sit wherever you wanted. We were sat next to the guy who owns the Midland Pig Company, who won an award for being the biggest entrepreneur in the farming network. He was a very interesting guy to talk to.

SH. You went to that as a young farmer?

SB. I got the opportunity through Staffordshire Young Farmers to go there, yeh. Like the opportunities are endless. You could go travelling, and also there's a business award, so you could be granted money if you wanted to start a business.

SH. So, what about your farming, what do you aspire to as far as farming goes?

SB. To be fair, I do really enjoy what I do, but I want to move further forward in it. I'm not qualified; I tried Harpur Adams, but I didn't enjoy it, I just missed farming, home life and Young Farmers.

SH. Surely, work based learning is a way forward?

SB. Yeh. Now, looking back, I wish I'd done an apprenticeship or something like that, because you get your qualification while working, but then I'm settled in my job now and feel much better for it.

SH. You don't always need a qualification to make a success of your life.

SB. No you don't, but I'm doing an accountancy course at the moment, a night class at Buxton college on Wednesday nights. I can do Chartered if I like to from it, but if I get a level 4, I can do professional book keeping. In time, I would love to take on farming if it's worthwhile doing it.

SH. What sort of avenues would you be interested in in a farming way?

SB. Sheep farming; I love my sheep. We are all very commercially based here. We are moving into Aberfields, Innovis breeding. Cross breeding. It does seem to be working well.

SH. Like you've done with the Stabiliser cattle, composite breeds, you're interested in composite sheep? You're not interested in any of the old fashioned breeds?

SB. To be fair, I do love Cheviots and Swales. A big fan. I've always had Cheviot sheep myself or Cheviot crosses. We bought some this time and put Aberfield on them to get strong mules, then stronger lambs again from those. It's just like a hobby on the side. I've always liked lambing; every opportunity if I've time off, I've worked at home. But then with these pigs coming in now; the pig job seems very good. The pig side now suits me more than the cows. I've always liked me cows, but I've always preferred sheep. The problem is I can't spend enough time with them because I'm always working. If I work full time, then I miss helping these lot in a morning, then weekends I work Saturdays, so I'm only free on a Sunday when I'm always helping out next door doing pigs and stuff. In time I'd like to cut down on work and help more at home, or it depends what happens, who you meet, I don't know what's going to happen on that side of things. I feel the future of farming could be quite prosperous, there are young people coming into farming now; I do understand I've had it lucky where I am with mum and dad and my brother, just us four. It's grand, but a lot of people I know struggle because there's that many family members involved or they want to rent a farm, but the running costs are that expensive, they can't make it worthwhile. I'd like to see it develop and grow. Like, there's more technical developments now, like these composite sheep and cattle breeds, which seem to be paying off. I think it will go more that way. Sat where I am now, I feel very lucky, but I know a lot of people in more difficult situations than I'm going to be. It's sad to say, but its hard work to get a step on the ladder. There are opportunities out there but it's taking the plunge and just going for it, if that makes sense.