

From Farm to Fork

If you have visions of selling your very successful West of Scotland shipping company to make a lifestyle change to become a farmer then you cannot aim higher than start a search with the following brief.

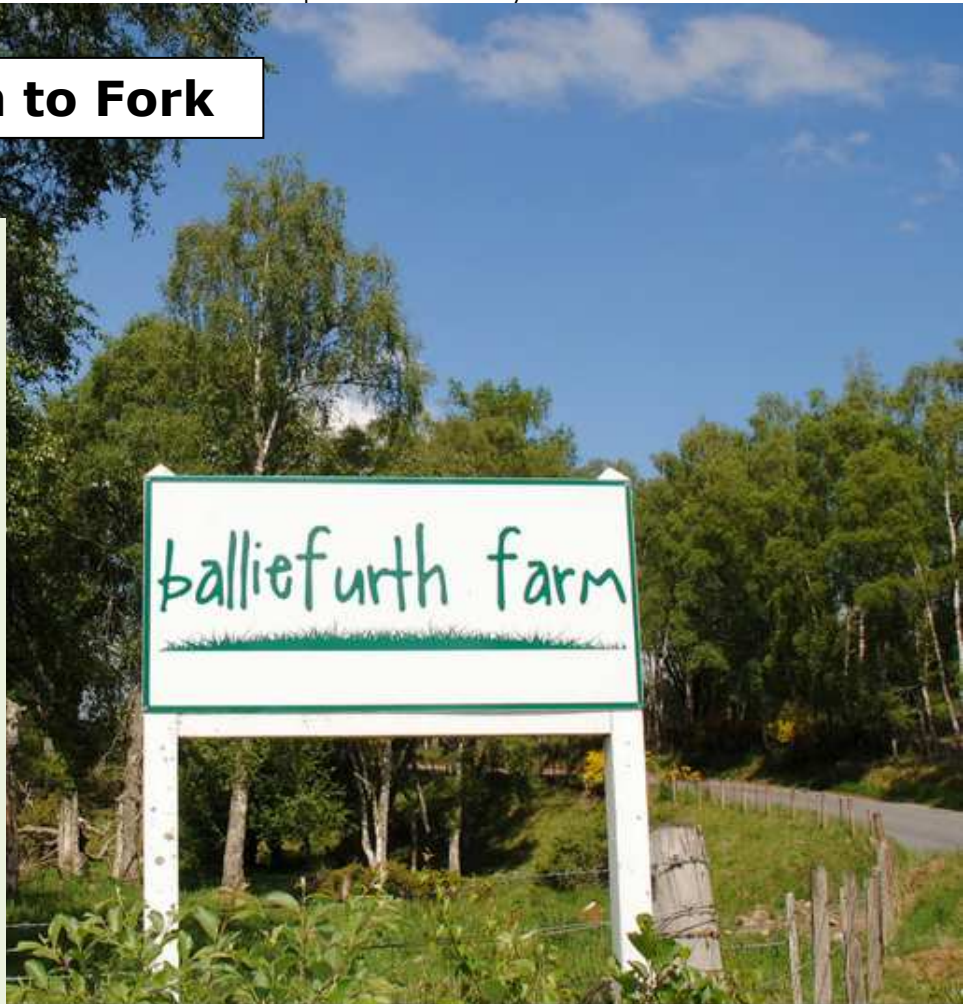
A rural setting in one of the most picturesque parts of Scotland. A river flowing through an unblemished landscape and one that is attractive to fishermen for all the right reasons. Its banks would have ample grazing to run a pedigree herd of Shorthorn cattle and extensive grassland to satisfy 210 ewes and their offspring.

Man and nature would be at peace here. The aspen trees in the woodland supporting Aspen Hoverfly and the Dark Bordered Moth.

Environmentally rich with undulating fields, low fields which are famous for wading birds such as Curlew, Redshank, Peewits, Oystercatchers and more. Add to the mix the frequent visits from roe deer and brown hare then this has to be the location of dreams.

So when Patrick and Abby Harrison discovered this Highland farm situated between Grantown and Nethy Bridge in the Cairngorms National Park their visions were fulfilled. Balliefurth Farm comprises 180 hectares (400 acres) and includes 43 hectares of natural woodland which is used for grazing. They have a bank of the Spey River and the Speyside Way walking route sweeps right through the farm.

The Highland farm, stocks 80 Shorthorn Cross breeding cows, 2 pedigree shorthorn bulls, 210 Highland Mule ewes and 5 Texel Tups, 2 Lleyn Tups and not forgetting 6 bee hives. Patrick had a great desire to become a farmer and he is now very much hands on.





In March 2015 they bought the local butchers' shop from Mike Mustard so that the beef and lamb could be taken straight off the farm and sold locally. Balliefurth Farm is only a couple of miles up the road so the meat in what is now called the Balliefurth Farm Shop could not be much more local. Dingwall abattoir provides the service to receive produce and return in carcasses.

The farm had been selling at farmers markets but changed focus to sell through their Nethy Bridge shop.

Jamie Barnett is in charge of the retail operations. He moved from his hometown, Dornoch when Grants moved to Speyside in 1996.

Twenty years later when Balliefurth Farm bought the local butchers and Patrick explained to him what he intended to do, Jamie agreed to come and run it. Jamie explained:-

"I lived only a mile and a half along the road so it was great for me. I weighed up the situation and thought it was time for a change."

The butchers' shop and the adjacent house were purchased and all the work went into transforming the house into a shop. The changes were a gradual process. The original shop traded as it was while the building work was underway next door.

The new design was a joint effort between Patrick and Jamie. Clancool were responsible for the new refrigeration and local tradespeople Laing's the local builders and Graham MacPherson the local electrician all had a part to play.

Finally in August 2016 the ten feet move from old to new took place and customers were welcomed into the new shop. Jamie said "the customers all love it and Mike Mustard loves it." In fact Mike loved it so much he doesn't want to leave.





The new shop is simply stunning. Refrigerated counters sweep around from left to right. There is a ready to eat counter, offering delicious deli foods such as pies, cheeses and cooked meat. Alongside this there is a lengthy separate fresh meat counter selling a wide variety of other meats and poultry. Everything is shown off to its absolute best and the invitations to spend burst out on you wherever you look.

Fresh locally grown fruit and vegetables and other farm shop products abound with the emphasis on locally sourced.

The range of stock is striking. Yes, there is the expected accompaniments but the vast array of speciality food items for sale would challenge Fortum and Masons. What's more Jamie quickly points out, everything is there because it sells.

The shop oozes quality but also has a magnetic like effect of infecting the customer with enthusiasm about the locally raised beef and lamb and coupled with all the ancillary items available here, creates the ability to turn every meal into a gourmet occasion. To put customers well and truly at ease there is even a self service coffee shop in what used to be a bedroom, with a view out into the back garden.

Business has really picked up since moving into the new shop with very regular locals and almost as regular, holiday let visitors. Mail Order is in its infancy but greater effort will be made there in time to come.

The shop provides employment for Jamie, Mike and Alan. Jamie's wife Alison spends a few hours every week looking after the ordering and replenishing of the dry goods.

Eight different varieties of burgers are made and 14 different link sausages. After the predictably best selling pork and beef sausages, the next most popular is their Cairngorm Sausage which combines local beef and lamb with ginger and mustard.





During the barbecue season burgers and sausages are firm favourites but there are other offerings such as Cajun chicken fillets and of course Alison has the shelves well stocked with interesting bbq sauces and marinades.

There is an attractive range of fresh fruit and vegetables which is restocked daily. Every effort is made to source all the shop's stock locally. Strawberries when in season come from Alvie, free range eggs from Allarburn, jams from Auchnahannet, ice cream from the Black Isle and even an impressive array of local gins.

The shop makes its own steak pies and is open 8.00am until 5.30pm Monday to Saturday with Saturday's remaining the busiest trading day. With its fantastic range of products the Balliefurth Farm shop is trying everything to attract customers.

For those who are visitors to Speyside this shop is a gastronomic bonus but Jamie sees the greatest challenge is to attract more locals in the door. He would like to entice younger customers to the shop and despite Nethy Bridge being a small village he believes that there are still some residents who have not been in to see the new farm shop.

A home delivery service is there as an option but for those who pass by and don't drop in, what a treat they are missing out on.

