

Briefing 1706

AgriChatUK - "Love and relationships in farming" discussion 28/02/13

Summary

The importance and strength of relationships in farming was a key factor. Relationships often started through YFCs and colleges. Those from outside farming backgrounds need a willingness to learn and understanding that the farm always comes first. Partnerships on the farm help to create a team from which husband and wife draw strength from each other through the hard times, though this is not always healthy when one needs a break. Understanding, humour and love were three of the key words associated with love and relationships in farming, and that success with the right person by your side is the ultimate goal. Being gay within farming was still seen as a taboo in some cases, though tolerance and acceptance are now more commonplace.

Introduction

The aim of AgriChatUK is to give everyone involved in agriculture a place to share ideas, discuss pressing rural issues, debate hot topics and connect with people in the industry who may not otherwise be easily accessible. It is a weekly 2 hour Q&A discussion session held every Thursday evening between 8-10pm on the social media micro-blogging platform Twitter. Its first session was in March 2012.

A website has also been developed which has basic how-to guides to taking part in the discussions and how-to tweet in general. This is: <http://www.agrichatuk.com>

The discussion held on Thursday 28th February 2013 looked at the topic of "Love and relationships in farming – how are they different?" and generated a total of 556 tweets on the topic from 88 participants. These included farmers, agri-food businesses, rural advisors, land agents, lawyers, journalists, academics and NFU officeholders, as well as members of the general public.

A full in-depth read through of the discussion can be found here, on the archives page of the website: <http://www.agrichatuk.com/archives/>

Q1a You may have heard that NASA is looking for a couple to travel to Mars- would a farming couple be suited to this? Why?

- No, far too claustrophobic!
- Who would look after the farm?
- Yes. Self-reliance, isolation, rest of humanity not having a clue what they are doing and how it impacts on them
- Only if they could take their dogs/horses/favourite cow with them

- Most farmers I know don't like being more than 20ft off the ground, looking over the clamp wall gives me the eeby jeebys
- Ag couples are great at coping at not seeing much of each other, might be a culture shock!
- Jestng aside, farming people are adaptable to adverse conditions, can bear routine and solitary tasks

Q1b Any fun/ interesting stories to tell re farming ways to propose or make a romantic gesture?!

- He picks flowers from the hedge or garden, I buy him a Landrover magazine!
- Nothing says romance like the pile of straw that falls out the bottom of my overalls
- Not sure I've experienced one of them yet?
- Proposal? Late home from the farm, chucked a ring box at me and went shy (v out of character). Kind of romantic-ish?
- Out for lovely smart lunch, then went to his farm, he changed into his overalls! Walk over field with my dogs and he proposed

Q2a How many people are on dating websites? And what would be the type of person you would look for?

- It is estimated that 1/2 all UK singles are on dating sites
- I am, used to be on partners4farmers it used to have a great chat room, similar to twitter. Now MM
- It surprises me how many farmer-type dating sites out there. Shows there are probably more lonely farmers than you think!
- Based on UK population, approx 12 million on dating sites. There are 74,000 on Muddy Matches
- I would think more lots of ladies who dream of a country house and pony paddock = farmer but don't like reality
- A beautiful one, but beauty is in the eye of the beholder!
- I have just joined, more window shopping than anything else! Must be able to sleep thru a 3:45am and be v understanding!
- It's very difficult to meet anyone when your left on your own, dating sites are a great way to meet people

Q2b Into arable or does the livestock farmer make you swoon? What is the attractiveness of farmer/rural types?

- Arable for me. Lot of respect for livestock WAGs, must be a lot to deal with!
- Dairy farmers often have large strong hands, livestock farmers often very fit, never been out with a tractor chap
- The physicality of farming means that a lot of farmers are strong. I wouldn't want to pick a sector though.
- Livestock farmer. Nice little shirt, jumper, jeans and a good pair of wellies
- A farmers/workers wife is a special breed of lady! Needs to be
- Ladies, ladies, it must be livestock, surely? Specifically SHEEP.

- Dating game definitely harder for the livestock farmers
- Some tractor driver girlfriends will spend time with them on their tractor at busy times
- TBH during harvest the whole world stops for eight weeks - there's no getting away from it.
- I enjoy taking food out to a guy in a tractor, but always been around livestock and I love it.

Q3a What particular qualities of your spouse or in your relationship helps you farm in your sector? E.g. communication, initiative...

- Trust and shared goals very important, especially if business partners too
- My old college lecturer reckoned if she can carry two conventional bales across the yard she's a keeper
- Smooth hands and sense of humour. Oh and a good shower if i've had bad day
- If u date someone non farming they generally don't understand that you're on call 24/7

Q3b How does the lifestyle and relationship in different farming sectors differ? E.g. dairy versus arable etc.

- The hours in dairy farming would make it a nightmare!
- All my dairy mates have to go home earlier than the rest on a night due to morning milking
- Arable isn't as bad as dairy apart from those few sunny days/weeks in summer
- Getting a dairy farmer to one of our events is almost impossible - they're so tied to the farm
- The unpredictability of the hours in Arable farming can be very difficult
- As a livestock farmer, you are 'married' to the job so to have someone who understands is paramount.
- Easier to go on hols & spend time together in arable sector, but harvest/drilling season is SO long compared to e.g. lambing

Q4a If both of you work together on the farm, does it strengthen or strain your relationship?

- In my experience strengthen, definitely strengthen. Such a team together
- I'd say both, a def strain on daily basis - 'but what doesn't kill you makes you stronger'
- Well mother and stepdad would nearly always end up arguing whilst doing sheep work! Then come the evening they would be fine
- I often hear people say it's their partner that gets them through/keeps them calm. Real strength
- Guess there are some good things about being in the same boat but does it mean you talk shop all the time?
- We both work in the business - he farms, I listen, and then process crops and sell - distinct roles makes us stronger!
- Can be difficult to escape/separate the two sometimes, not healthy
- There's nothing like a strong relationship for celebrating & commiserating

Q4b In general, does being in a relationship in the farming community come with different stresses? But opportunities too?

- Really important for all Farmers to have minimum 21 Cow Free Days (CFDs) sometimes called Child Free Days per year.
- Stresses are not seeing one another whenever we want due to not working 9-5 etc...
- Inevitably, yes. But the compensations are enormous
- Lack of family weekend hard but at least he just outside if we need him and pops in and out unlike if he worked away.
- Yes, long hours and no real certainty of time off in advance, but bril op for amazin locations to live and work
- Always gonna be stresses its the nature of the job but plenty of opportunities with so many contacts thru things like YFC
- Long hours same; lack of hols same for both; she knows it's the ewe, not another woman

Q5a "A Farming relationship will only survive if both involved are from a farming background" Discuss.

- We're neither from a farming background! But can see your point!! It's more about understanding the job that counts
- I'm not, OH is, together almost 11 years. Don't think it matters, it's about shared goals/ideals
- I hope they don't need to as I'm from non-farming background and just entering this whole new world. Very hopeful
- I think I'd be almost inclined to agree, not everyone can grasp the fact the farm comes first
- It can work if the non-farming person is willing to learn and muck in, and understands that the farm has to come first
- Good communication is the thing
- Both being from a farming background means you have understanding at tough times
- Probably, but not essential - I'm an accountant, and two accountants would not have much to talk about!
- Diff btwn both being from farming background and both being committed to current farm. Former not essential. Latter yes

Q5b How easy/ hard is it to meet a partner if you're in farm community? What about meeting someone outside it?

- Farming or non-farming, meeting people gets harder when all your friends are settling/have settled down
- As much as I love farming I still find myself drawn to girls who have less to do with farming!
- Must be hard if you miss the small window of opportunity from YF or college

Q5c What can be added to a relationship and farm if one of you are from outside the farming community?

- I think he would say he has a new drive and enthusiasm for the farm. (But is bombarded by questions)

- In hubby's case it would be that there is life beyond the farm
- Could that possibly be because they possibly bring something different into your world?
- Research suggests good relationships need a balance between similarities and differences between partners
- I'm not afraid to put forward ideas/ questions. Want to know why everything happens. Maybe makes him think more?
- Surely an interest and enthusiasm for farming is what you want? The rest can be taught

Q6a What comes first- success of farming business or relationship? But are the two linked?

- Definitely linked, Business Partnerships are teams and that goes hand in hand with a great relationship
- Making the farm successful together with the right person is the ultimate goal
- I'd say as an outsider coming in they have to go hand in hand. Both as important as each other. Passion in both
- If the latter is strong enough then you'll both be aiming for the same success

Q6b In ag, when marriage goes wrong can things get extra complicated, e.g. legally? Anyone experience of this?

- Financial settlements are a nightmare...how can you quantify how much you have both put into a farm?
- In separation it is always best to try and be civil and keep lawyers out of it if possible...try mediation if necessary
- Horribly - because it is a business dispute with an automatic personal angle
- Don't mention marriage, a girlfriend would be a start! One step at a time and all
- Separation is easy but have seen many separated farming couples getting on better than most, as the farm comes first

Q7 Is being gay a big taboo in farming? How easy/hard is it for a gay farmer to find a partner or lead the life they want?

- I know several gay farmers who are very much part of the community
- Being gay seems to be a taboo in most rural communities...time we became more tolerant maybe
- Our yfc county chairman was gay, and a farmer, and no one looked at him differently
- Based on stats 1% of people are gay and 19% live in rural areas, so it is harder to find a partner.
- Taboo still around, but know at least one person who was pleasantly surprised at positive reaction when he came out
- The number of gay people joining Muddy Matches has been steadily increasing, but not all farmers
- I know a chap and he isn't treated any differently. Does better with guys than I ever did with the ladies!

- I still think male farmers feel huge stress & pressure and pray that their sons aren't gay! Still old fashioned

**Q8 So what do YOU think makes a good long term partner and relationship in ag?
Summarise in three words**

- Work when needed?!
- Humour, understanding, love makes a good relationship in ag
- Committed, unshockable, loving. Those are the most important
- Patience, understanding.....cake
- Understanding, committed and patient
- Lust, HardWork & Understanding!
- Understanding, keen baker and funny. If cake and laughter can't get you through a tough day, nothing will!!
- I hope: Communication, Understanding & Affection

Simon Haley, Reading Agricultural Consultants, and Alan Spedding, 5 March 2013

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