

# FIRST FOR YOUNG FARMERS

**Helen, many congratulations on your recent appointment. Tell us a little bit about yourself.**

I am originally from Berriew, near Welshpool, mid Wales. I lived there with my family until 2008 when I moved to live with my boyfriend on his parents' dairy farm in Pembrokeshire.

I work for the Welsh Assembly Government, in the Rural Affairs Department as Farming Connect Delivery Manager. Farming Connect is funded through the Rural Development Plan for Wales 2007-2013 and provides support to farming families throughout Wales to enable them to run their business more efficiently and to safeguard the future of their farm.



**What are your aims for your year in office?**

To visit as many counties in England and Wales as I can. I believe it is important for the national officers to be seen at as many events as possible, to make new friends and to experience how YFC County Federations operate in different parts of the country.

To increase the opportunities for the organisation's members who are under 18 to be involved in decision-making at national level.

To continue to increase membership numbers throughout England and Wales.



Helen Roberts was elected as chairwoman of the NFYFC in November 2009, becoming the first-ever person from Montgomery in the national role, and the first from Wales since 1990. Chris Taylor went to meet her

**What is your farming background?**

My parents farm 1,000 acres on an upland farm in mid Wales. They have 3,000 breeding ewes and 200 cattle. Nowadays I try to get home to help on the farm whenever I can and one of my favourite pastimes is helping out in the lambing season.

**At what age did you join NFYFC and why?**

I joined Berriew YFC at the age of 14 because my parents had been members and encouraged me and my friends to join. I joined primarily to make friends outside of the school environment. Immediately after joining YFC you begin to make new friends in your village, the wider community and eventually your county and even further afield. Another big appeal to me were the YFC competitions, particularly cookery which I loved and wanted to pursue as a career when I was younger. Competing at cookery gave me a chance to develop my skills and was a YFC activity I excelled at. Joining YFC was also the thing to do, and in many places I think it still is – certainly in my own club and in Wales, where YFC is a passion and very much a part of the countryside culture. I went on to hold the positions of club secretary, treasurer, chairwoman and club leader.

**How does it feel to have been elected chairwoman of one of the largest rural youth organisations in the UK?**

It's great to be the first person from my county of Montgomeryshire and the first from Wales since 1990. YFC has always had, and still has, a vital role to play in helping to develop networks of support, skills and a sense of community involvement in rural areas. While its role and members are now no longer confined to just a farming involvement, YFC continues to offer a host of opportunities for personal and career development, social and business networking, peer support, friendships for life, volunteering and developing social responsibility and involvement, along with chances to travel and experience new cultures.

These days it fills a need for rural youth in general. YFC involvement also gives young people in farming a real voice and chance to contribute to and influence government and industry initiatives through NFYFC representation on a number of important industry groups, such as TRIG, Fresh Start, NFU, CLA and Lantra. There are also opportunities to speak at various events and help with issues facing the industry such as the high accident and death toll affecting farmers through the current HSE "Make the Promise" campaign, the Agri Skills Strategy and the IGD Skills Summit.

**Why did you choose the Royal Agricultural Benevolent Institution (RABI) as the NFYFC's charity for the year?**

RABI is a charity that has supported so many farming families throughout England and Wales, and in 2010 it is celebrating its 150th anniversary so I feel it is most appropriate that this is my chosen charity for the year. I am a member of the Pembrokeshire RABI ladies' committee, which has raised hundreds of pounds for the charity.

**I understand that you have challenged all 662 clubs to raise a million pounds for RABI**

Founded in 1860, RABI has an unbroken history of providing long-term care and emergency help for retired farmers, farm workers and working farmers and their families who find themselves in financial difficulties.

A host of events are planned throughout 2010 to help RABI commemorate past achievements, celebrate the anniversary and raise awareness of the valuable support it offers the farming community, including the anniversary race day at Ludlow in April; London 10k road run in July; an anniversary challenge in Dorset in September and, of course, Welly Week in October.

NFYFC members and office holders joined the charity and acted as ushers at a thanksgiving service held at Westminster Abbey on 24 February. I carried the NFYFC standard in the procession and vice chairman James Chapman, who received support from RABI after losing his arm in a farming accident, read the lesson.

YFC members are wonderfully innovative and resourceful when it comes to devising fun and funky fundraisers and other events so I'm sure they will come up with no end of surprising ways of rising to my challenge and I'm really looking forward to seeing what they come up with.

**Do you have any advice for youngsters looking for a career in agriculture and the countryside?**

I believe it is an attractive industry providing a wealth of opportunities for motivated, skilled and dedicated people who understand the importance of agriculture and horticulture, food production and the countryside. Young people are a key component in this exciting and essential industry.

**Don't forget, NFYFC Members can join the Royal Agricultural Society of England for just £15. For more information on Membership, please call 02476 858303 or visit [www.rase.org.uk/membership](http://www.rase.org.uk/membership)**

